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The Influence of Instructional Coaches on Improving Teaching and Student Performance

Mariella Hodges Simons

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THE INFLUENCE OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES ON IMPROVING TEACHING
AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE

By

Mariella Hodges Simons

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Educational Leadership
in the Department of Instructional Systems,
Leadership and Workforce Development

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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TEACHING

AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE

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Instructional coaching is emerging as a job-embedded professional development tool for schools to utilize in an effort to improve teaching practice and student achievement. Since there is a lack of understanding of the differing roles served by instructional coaches in schools and the functions they perform that influence teacher utilization of best practice procedures in teaching, this study concentrated on giving voice to teachers and administrators regarding their concerns and changes in teaching behavior.

The intent of this qualitative case study was to examine the roles played by instructional coaches in two schools in the third largest district within the state of Mississippi and how administrators, teachers, and students (the stakeholders) are affected by the presence of instructional coaches within this environment, inclusive of hindrances or problems perceived.

Recommendations are included in the study that should be useful to school districts that are determining the efficacy of adding instructional coaches to staff. Generally, it is imperative to train the principal of the school housing an instructional coach so he understands the roles, exclusions, and possibilities inherent in the position. Additionally, it is important to write a detailed job description for the coaching position to clarify the role and expectations for the coaching program. Coaches must be trained on strategies to use in teacher training sessions that are conducted 'just in time' at the local school, inclusive of training on adult learning theory, brain- based research, and instructional models that can meet the needs of teachers that are in different career stages. It is necessary for all stakeholders to realize that positive results may depend on providing the same level of support at the school and district levels that was offered during this study and that results may not be evident during the first year of program implementation.

DEDICATION

I lovingly dedicate this document to my mother, whose encouragement is forever with me, though she is gone.

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Sincere thanks go to my family. To Larry, my husband, who checked on me often during my long stints of working at the computer. To my son, Evan, who made me take a break now and then. To my daughter, Mallory, who had faith that I could accomplish this goal. To my brothers, Barney and James, who kept reminding me that it was a dream of our mother that I reach this level in my educational endeavors. To my mother, Mary Williams Hodges Brassfield, who gave me the initiative and drive to finish a task once committed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction	1
Background of Problem	3
Problem Statement	6
Research Questions	7
Rationale for a Qualitative Design	9
Theoretical Framework	11
Collegial Work Environment	12
Use of Adult Learning Theory	13
Coaching Models	14
Summary of Theoretical Framework	16
Limitations/Researcher Subjectivity	16
Significance of the Study	18
Definition of Terms	18
Summary/Overview	22
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	24
Introduction	24
Role or Job Function of Instructional Coaches	26
Practices for Hiring Instructional Coaches	30
Coaching Models	31
Standards for Instructional Coaching	34
Hindrances to Success	39
Link to Student Achievement	42

CHAPTER	Page
Elements Necessary for Success of Coaching Programs	44
Other Job Embedded Professional Development Models	46
School Reform Via Professional Development	47
Examining Teacher Assignments and Student Work	49
Professional Learning Communities.....	51
Pedagogical Development Through Instructional Coaching	53
Summary	55
III. METHODOLOGY	56
Introduction.....	56
Rationale for Specific Design	58
Case Study Rationale	59
Data Collection Methods	61
Rationale for Case Study in Exploring Instructional Coaching	63
Context of Study	65
Setting	68
Participants	71
Theoretical Framework for Data Collection and Interpretation	72
Methods Employed	73
Interview	73
Observation	76
Document Collection	80
Document Analysis	81
Data Analysis	83
Pragmatics of the Study	86
Issues of Rigor	87
Credibility	89
Triangulation	90
Member Checks	90
Dependability	91
Audit Trail	91
Subjectivity	91
Transferability	92
Thick, Rich Description	93
Ethics	93
Summary/Conclusion	93

CHAPTER	Page
IV. FINDINGS.....	95
Introduction	95
Question #1: What roles does the instructional coach play in the school setting?.....	96
Question #2: How do roles served by the instructional coach influence student performance and teacher practice?	102
Part A: Determining Influence of Coaches on Student Performance	102
Part B: Ascertaining Influence of Coaches on Teacher Effectiveness	108
Part C: Ascertaining Influence of Coaches on Teachers	118
Question #3: What hindrances or problems are perceived by educators encountering an instructional coach within a school?	126
Summation of Information Gathered from Coaches.....	135
Summary	142
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS	144
Summary	144
Conclusions.....	145
Recommendations.....	155
Suggestions for Future Study	163
Closing Remarks	165
REFERENCES	167
APPENDIX	
A STATE OF MISSISSIPPI ACCREDITATION RATINGS FOR SCHOOLS UNDER STUDY	176
B MISSISSIPPI CURRICULUM TEST – SCORE CHANGES FROM 2001 TO 2005 FOR SCHOOLS UNDER STUDY	178
C MISSISSIPPI WRITING ASSESSMENT MEAN SCORES FOR SCHOOLS UNDER STUDY	180

CHAPTER	Page
D NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF NON-PROMOTIONS BY GRADE FOR SCHOOLS UNDER STUDY	182
E DIVISION OF TIME OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES IN TWO SCHOOLS UNDER INVESTIGATION	184
F INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – PRINCIPALS	186
G INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES	188
H INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – TEACHER GRADE CHAIRS	190

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The recognized instructional leader in the school today is the principal; however, the daily demands of the job sometimes prevent this professional educator from attending to the detail of guiding teachers through implementation of best practice strategies within the classroom. School improvement initiatives that have directly addressed the learning or actions of teachers include an emphasis on developing professional learning communities, setting up a mechanism for examination of student work and teacher assignments, or implementing a chosen reform model that involves collaborative leadership. Recognizing that schools need a strategy that increases capacity beyond the impact of a single leader at the helm, instructional coaching has emerged as a trend to distribute leadership responsibilities (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003; Taylor, 2004).

Traditionally, an instructional coach is a veteran educator with deep knowledge of education from content and pedagogical perspectives, has exemplary communication skills, and demonstrates leadership capacity as a technical advisor to teachers as they, individually or collectively in teams, work toward meeting school district and personal

instructional improvement goals (Elmore, 1997; Southern Regional Education Board, 2000). Although coaching has assumed many job titles, job descriptions, and diverse formats for working with teachers, this form of job embedded professional development has proven to hold great potential for improving schools (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003). Instructional coaches, whether hired for the purpose of impacting a single goal defined by a school district or charged with the task of assisting teachers with a multitude of objectives, can serve a vital role as a guide to novice or struggling teachers in need of professional direction. By facilitating school improvement efforts within the local school and district, instructional coaches can provide a consistent link between classroom teachers and initiatives set by administrators. Teachers who generally feel isolated in their task of educating students (Goodlad, 1984; Southern Regional Education Board, 2003) can benefit from a move toward creating a culture within the school that is collaborative and focused on improving student learning (Aspen Institute, 2003; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

By providing instructional coaches as the recognized on-site curriculum and instructional specialist, school administrators attempt to construct a learning environment for teachers that is convenient, responsive to personal queries of individual educators on their particular level of need, and collegial. This action on the part of an administrator has the potential for creating a situation in which professional growth can occur continuously within the local setting, while educators develop an increased commitment to the shared responsibility of insuring that student achievement reaches the desired

standard. By thus differentiating instruction for individual teachers or for identified groups through utilization of instructional coaches, the school should yield positive results for students as well as the educators themselves (Lieberman, 1995).

As with any improvement model implemented within the school, the visible and vocal backing of the principal is essential to the success of the process. Instructional coaching is no exception as experienced teachers are generally the most resistant to change (Norton, 1999), yet may experience personal empowerment by voluntarily participating in the opportunity to direct their own professional learning (Arnau, Kahrs & Kruskamp, 2004). The support of the principal for can convince even seasoned educational veterans that they can benefit from a coaching relationship as a climate may develop that encourages teachers to attempt new strategies or improve on defined skill areas, while seeking feedback from a trusted colleague (Southern Regional Education Board, 2003).

The intent of this qualitative case study was to examine the roles played by instructional coaches in two schools in the third largest district within the state of Mississippi and how administrators, teachers, and students (the stakeholders) view the presence of instructional coaches within this environment.

Background of Problem

In the 1970's, Joyce and Showers introduced data that indicated that only ten percent of teachers implemented strategies learned in staff development sessions, while they incorporated these same strategies at a ninety percent level if provided coaching

(Joyce & Showers, 1980; Killion, 2002). In subsequent years, instructional coaching in a variety of formats has been instigated with a general impression of success as teachers reported that improved collaboration helped change classroom practice by focusing attention on instructional strategies, curriculum development and student achievement goals (Aspen Institute, 2003; Killion, 2002; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). Instructional coaches offer an additional point of view to classroom teachers that was not available prior to implementation of instructional coaching in schools. Teachers may benefit from observing different teaching styles in action, as this provides a fresh perspective relative to student interaction in a different setting. The use of coaching as a professional development tool may also enhance the collaborative culture within the school and can bring school wide change as this modification of the work environment of teachers can yield greater professional commitment to stretching instructional capacity and improved confidence in personal teaching abilities (Black, Molseed & Sayler, 2003; Guskey, 2000; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001). In-house staff developers or coaches work individually, in small groups, or with entire faculties to meet unique needs of the local school, thereby creating a measurable impact on teacher quality and student achievement (Easton, 2004; Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003).

By participating in the emerging trend that places instructional coaches within local schools, school districts are able to transcend the greatest barriers to having a high quality teaching work force: isolation and a lack of professional development for experienced teachers (Killion, 2002). When school districts send teachers to one day

professional development opportunities, teachers return from the training sessions and enter their classroom to attempt the new skill or strategy through trial and error learning, as the majority of teachers are physically and philosophically isolated from their peers. As Sparks (2002) and Robb (2000) indicated in their works on redesigning staff development for teachers, one day training sessions are quite ineffective.

When coaching is effectively implemented on a school campus, impediments to teacher learning can be simultaneously destroyed as teachers have a coach with whom to discuss new ideas and promising practices, negating the tendency of teachers to refrain from asking for assistance to avoid the appearance of being incompetent or of lacking adequate professional knowledge (Griffin, Wohlstetter & Bharadwaja, 2001; Truesdale, 2003). Providing opportunities for teachers to interact as colleagues will assist in the professional growth process (Blachowicz, Obrochta, & Fogelberg, 2005; Goodlad, 1984; Hall & McKeen, 1991; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001).

In the United States, educators are being held increasingly accountable for student performance, as evidenced by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002) and subsequent state legislation and state department of education regulations relative to testing, accreditation and accountability of school districts. Within this framework, school districts seeking ways to address student academic needs have realized the importance of teacher effectiveness in seeking to positively influence student success levels. Hence, the use of instructional coaches has been increasing nationwide (Aspen Institute Program on Education: Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2003;

Center on Education Policy, 2004; Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003); however, little information exists in academic literature that examines the influence of instructional coaches on utilization of best practice pedagogy in elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Without these types of studies, adequate support for this strategy of school improvement may not be forthcoming. Further, studies of instructional coaching programs are necessary so educators can gain a better understanding of the instructional coaching process. This will keep school districts from duplicating the struggles in finding practices that work the best. By sharing in detail the discoveries of two schools within one school district, other educational entities (Center on Education, 2004) may be able to use the information shared to transfer the strategies to their local situation and craft an instructional coaching program that includes the elements that best fit their unique needs.

Problem Statement

There is a lack of understanding of the differing roles of instructional coaches in schools and how the functions performed by an instructional coach influence teacher utilization of best practice procedures in teaching. Since most studies of instructional coaching within schools across the nation have concentrated on a quantitative analysis of the extent to which teachers view their skill as instructors to have improved, it is appropriate that this study concentrated on giving voice to teachers and administrators regarding their concerns and changes in teaching behavior. By listening to the assertions of educators employed within the schools housing an instructional coach, it is possible to

gain an in-depth understanding of how the presence of an instructional coach influences, or does not influence, the efforts or initiatives undertaken by the school and district.

Research Questions

The establishment of three broad research questions set boundaries on the study and created a manageable size for exploration of the issue defined (Creswell, 2003; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Information was gathered from multiple formats to describe the influence of the instructional coach on the school environment.

The guiding questions for this study are as follows:

1. What roles does the instructional coach play in the school setting?
2. How do roles served by the instructional coaches influence student performance and teacher practice?
3. What hindrances or problems are perceived by educators when encountering an instructional coach within a school?

The three research questions were designed to provide a holistic view of the function performed by the instructional coach within the educational setting. Question one directed investigation into describing the many functions served by the instructional coach within a school setting, including those described within an official job description, tasks that arise out of situations as they occur, and responsibilities assigned by a supervising principal that are aimed at accomplishing everyday tasks within the school. Additionally, question one was posed within the research of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (2003) as the researchers sought evidence that school-based professional

developers assist schools with improvement issues. Question two was undertaken to determine how instructional coaches influence student performance. Improving academic achievement of students is of paramount importance to school administrators and teaching staff due to recently imposed accountability issues, but has historically been the professed mission of the educators. This question sought to describe those roles or tasks undertaken by the instructional coaches that may possibly influence student learning and teacher classroom practices. Addressing this question should assist readers in crafting job descriptions of instructional coaches to best fit the academic needs of students within their care. Question three addressed the inherent problems within human relationships as they exist in a school setting, putting definition to teacher voiced hindrances and problems noted within the coaching process. In any social setting, including an educational institution, it is essential to identify and explore problems perceived by those present in the environment. By identifying the possible obstructions and barriers that individuals or groups may present, progress may be accomplished more efficiently. Further, it may be possible to avert negative attitudes or reactions to the instructional coach or the initiatives undertaken by the position if steps are taken to recognize the potential encumbrances that could impede progress. Moreover, the three guiding questions are directed at the gaps in the literature on the subject of instructional coaching and sought to clarify the function of instructional coaches in elementary and secondary schools within our nation.

Rationale for a Qualitative Design

It was appropriate to utilize a qualitative research design to accomplish the purposes established within this defined project since this format for study allows the researcher to present the perspectives of the participants within context. This allows the reader of the study an opportunity to gain insight into the circumstances involved in the specific schools studied so that a determination can be made regarding transferability of the idea to their own educational situation. By encapsulating a thick, rich description within this study, reviewers are able to look at the roles served by instructional coaches within two specific school sites and the professional relationships that develop between teachers and instructional coaches that influence teaching behaviors.

The case study approach lends itself to the inclusion of the voices and viewpoints of many stakeholders, while allowing the reader to view the phenomena within its natural context (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, the case study approach lends itself to in-depth exploration of a process as the researcher has the opportunity to ask intensely searching questions, inquiring fully in whatever directions the research leads (Creswell, 2003). Since context provides an avenue for understanding a given situation and for making predictions about what replication of those circumstances might have on a similar setting, a qualitative research design is effective for determining practical answers to questions posed about an issue (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Given that the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data gathered, it is imperative that a detailed description be provided to the reader, who will be attempting to

make judgments based on the portrayal of data included within the study (Creswell, 2003). Additionally, the reader must be able to confirm that the findings described within the study portray a true picture of the situation and are not reflective of the biases of the researcher. Hence, an audit trail and use of an external reviewer can lend credibility to a study, giving it increased transferability and trustworthiness (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

Due to the nature of qualitative research in which unanticipated themes, patterns, and questions can arise during the data collection and analysis phases to affect the direction of the study, the researcher must exhibit flexibility by attending acutely to emerging issues and analyzing data as it is gathered. The simultaneous task of data gathering and analysis is imperative for a quality study. By reviewing documents in detail and carefully recording interviews and observations made, the researcher can note multiple perspectives present and reach a better understanding of the essence of the issue under consideration (Merriam, 1998).

A qualitative design was employed in this study as the cornerstone of data gathered were interviews, document review, and observations within the school setting. Multiple interviews were conducted with instructional coaches, teachers, and administrators. Documents perused included coach logs, school and teacher failure rates, fourth and seventh grade writing scores by school, numbers of curriculum maps and interdisciplinary units written, accreditation level, past interviews with teachers and administrators, National Writing Project study results, and teacher/administrator survey

data collected since the 2001-2002 school year. The documents regarding failure rates, accreditation level and writing scores were analyzed to ascertain student growth, thereby necessitating interpretation of some objective data contained in table format. The coaching logs, numbers of curriculum maps and interdisciplinary units written, and survey data were utilized to surmise growth in teacher effectiveness through increased utilization of best practice teaching strategies.

Theoretical Framework

In qualitative research, an emergent or grounded theoretical approach is preferred as the researcher can use constant comparative methodology, which allows for analysis of incidents and relationships continuously through the data gathering and analysis processes. Purposive sampling procedures are followed in an emergent design, as multiple realities of participants are discovered and explored until redundancy of information gathered is reached (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Generally, theory in a qualitative design follows an inductive logic process in which the researcher gathers information, asks open-ended questions, analyzes data to form themes, discovers broad patterns or theories, and generalizes this back to the review of literature. In this study, the connection to theory in the literature review can be placed within three broad categories: influence of a collegial work environment, use of adult learning theory in coaching, and coaching models. This information from the existing literature is important to review prior to reading the study as it assists the reader with forming a solid perspective of what coaching should look like in a school environment and how

instructional coaches may best deliver services to teachers and the school. Theory in this section is used as an explanation and a lens through which to view the remainder of the study (Creswell, 2003).

Collegial Work Environment

Teachers, who as a rule consider in-service training ineffective, contend that the most useful professional growth opportunities are personal experience and peer interaction (Arnau, Kahrs & Kriskamp, 2004; Brown & Moffett, 1999; Hall & McKeen, 1991). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future indicates that to improve, teachers require continuous reflection, mentoring, collegial interaction, expert role models and professional development training. The most opportune form of accomplishing these needs is through instructional coaching that is targeted toward a specific purpose (Robb, 2000; Sparks & Hirsh, 1999). Novice and experienced teachers benefit when they are observed and get feedback in a non-evaluative setting in which they can discuss the lesson delivered, plan future lessons, study the implication of standards set, examine student work, and solve common problems (Gemmell, 2003; Israel, 2003; Joyce & Showers, 1983). By breaking down the isolation of teachers through the organization of collegial environments, the climate for school reform and, consequently student achievement, improves, according to reform reports such as the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession and the National Commission on Excellence in Education, both published in the 1980's (Hall & McKeen, 1991). The National Staff Development Council advocates teachers learning together, as this leads to

planning of advanced lessons, improved quality of student work, and joint resolution of problems faced (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003). Teachers who work in isolation tend to be overwhelmed or unprepared for change in instructional practice, therefore retreat to familiar methods and fail to seek research on pedagogical techniques (Brown & Moffett, 1999; Gemmell, 2003). Risk-taking that improves instructional quality takes place more often in schools where the principal engenders a positive attitude toward a professional learning community, fosters an atmosphere supportive of critical inquiry and peer review of practice, creates conversations and common language about learning, and encourages joint curriculum work (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Gemmell, 2003; Robb, 2000). Further, students will experience achievement gains when teachers understand that knowledge and use of best practice teaching strategies are directly tied to student success (Brown & Moffett, 1999).

Use of Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory indicates that adults remain open to learning and that teachers, who have reached a high developmental stage in a helping profession with presumed psychological maturity in dealing with complex human interactions, should benefit from professional development situations that require reflection and interaction in pre/post conference settings, as happens in coaching models. Using instructional coaches to train teachers to be mentors can also be powerful due to the enhanced pride in accomplishment and decreased perception of loneliness (Thies-Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1987). This type of job embedded professional development is consistent with brain-

based adult learning research. Teachers should be supported through coaching, modeling, and mentoring for growth with a plan that recognizes that one size does not fit all and that workshops where participants sit and listen are quite ineffective. The most meaningful learning for teachers will be school based, take into consideration the career stages of teachers involved, support teachers in the activities of inquiry, observation, experimentation and reflection, focus on collaboration, relate to actual student work, sustain collaborative problem solving and be connected to school improvement efforts (Fullan, 1993; Ireland, 2003; Joyce & Showers, 1995). Coaching that allows for voluntary participation, collaboration, critical reflection, mutual respect, and self-directed learning will be effective with educators (Arnau, Kahrs & Kriskamp, 2004).

Coaching Models

Since research indicates that instructional coaching yields an application to teaching practice rate of ninety percent, it appears that the most effective use of professional development dollars would be school-based coaching as teachers benefit from the chance to observe quality teaching, discuss instruction, practice new techniques, and get technical feedback from a person viewed as assistive and knowledgeable (Joyce & Showers, 1995). There are several models under which coaching can be accomplished. In lesson study, which originated in Japan, teachers collaborate as a study team to develop a lesson, observe it being taught, and discuss ways to refine it. Peer coaching is a non-evaluative reciprocal process in which teachers are paired to discuss and share a strategy, observe each other and provide mutual support. Another model, cognitive

coaching, involves reflection, observation and asking questions of a coach after being taught specific skills. Technical or expert coaching involves the transfer of ideas learned in professional development into practice, while challenge coaching focuses on solving a persistent educational problem collaboratively. A critical friends group meets regularly to reflect on practice and analyze student work. In a learning walk, teachers look at student work and classroom artifacts and talk with students prior to participating in a discussion about observations made with the teacher involved. Mentoring involves experienced teachers being trained to help beginning educators (Bambino, 2002; Black, Molseed & Sayler, 2003; Cushman, 1998; Duggan, 2002; Hall & McKeen, 1991; Huling, 2000; Israel, 2003; Poglinco et al, 2003; Reiman & Peace, 2002).

In all models mentioned above, an instructional coach must take the leadership role to organize and guide the experience, creating a high quality school based professional development experience during the school day in which the focus is on deepening teacher content and pedagogical knowledge and providing a chance for practice, research and reflection. In a longitudinal study of the expenditure of Eisenhower professional development dollars conducted by the United States Department of Education in 2000, it was determined that professional development does change teacher practice if it is of a reform type, such as a study group, a collaborative, a mentorship or internship experience, or a resource center staffed with experts in teaching (Sparks, 2002).

Summary of Theoretical Framework

The theoretical categories framed within this section indicate major patterns found within the review of the literature on instructional coaching and allow the reader to view this qualitative study through this theoretical lens in addition to the views stated by participants within other chapters of this study, as is appropriate in an emergent design. This allows for data gathered during the research to complement or negate the theoretical framework at the end of the study when patterns and generalizations are compared to grounded theory.

Limitations/Researcher Subjectivity

Though transferability of the findings within this study is not a limitation, it is a consideration that must be determined by the reader. As this study is focused on two kindergarten through twelfth grade attendance zones within a single Mississippi school district, it may follow that the results could only be transferred to a school district, and perhaps even schools of like size, location and population. The fact that the study focuses on only two schools may be a further limitation when considering whether or not the findings have wide application potential. The school district under study is located outside the metropolitan area of the capital city, grows by an average of ten percent per year in school population, and is the third largest school district in the state of Mississippi with just under seventeen thousand students housed in eight attendance zones. This location may be considered a limitation by some as the conclusions drawn may not fit

more populated areas or regions of the country that have different expectations within a school setting.

Since the two zones of focus within this study, School One and School Two, receive federal assistance through Title I funds due to the large number of students that receive free and reduced lunch assistance, it may be that schools that do not receive such federal funding support will be careful in transferring the results to their setting. School Two, boasting around one thousand nine hundred students in the zone, is located on the outskirts of the Jackson metropolitan area between two large highway systems, has a solid industrial base, and a primarily middle to low-income population base. School One, housing around one thousand students in the zone, is located in a rural area about twenty miles from the Jackson metropolitan area, is dependent on chicken farming and manufacturing interests as its financial base, and is populated with low to low-middle income families with limited numbers expecting to attend post-secondary educational opportunities.

Though multiple interviews were conducted, not every teacher and administrator present within the schools under study was able to voice their concerns and comments. Interviews were carried out with the lead principal and with teacher leaders in each grade level in both schools, presenting a fairly representative group that was not reluctant to state their opinions and thoughts.

The instructional coaching program in the school district studied is supported administratively through weekly meetings of all instructional coaches with a district

office administrator, who keeps abreast of their accomplishments and progress toward meeting identified district initiatives. This factor affects the success of the program overall and should be considered a key element in any attempt to replicate the study. It should be noted that the district office administrator that meets regularly with the instructional coaches instituted the program, has a vested interest in its success, and is the principal investigator in this study. Hence, the subjectivity and level of involvement of the researcher must be considered by the reader when determining transferability of findings to their own setting.

Significance of the Study

Though many teachers that have worked with coaches contend that the experience has assisted them with infusing new skills and strategies learned into their classroom practice more efficiently than if they had not had a coach to consult, few studies have been done to scrutinize the roles served by the instructional coaches that influence teacher practice. Further, this study will address problems or hindrances perceived by educators when an instructional coach is employed within their local school setting (Poglinco et al, 2003). This study addresses these neglected elements in the research base.

Definition of Terms

An instructional coach, for the purpose of this study, is a non-evaluative collaborative learner who increases the dialogue between and among teachers for the

purpose of improving classroom instruction (Horn, Dallas & Strahan, 2002; Poglinco et al, 2003) and continually engages teachers in an interactive, inquiry based study of their craft (Feger, Woleck & Hickman, 2004; Robbins, 1991; Showers, 1985). The instructional coach has a curriculum background and understands content and pedagogical techniques. The coach is trained to observe classroom instruction objectively, provide non-judgmental feedback, customize materials to teacher curricular and instructional needs, and offer suggestions as new instructional situations develop (Computer Strategies, 2002; International Reading Association, 2004).

This study is predicated on the assumption that instructional coaches can engage in a variety of coaching models, as listed in the theoretical framework section above, simultaneously with varying groups within the school. Some teachers may need to participate in regular meetings of a critical friends group, while others may benefit most from technical coaching or a peer coaching relationship. It is the responsibility of the instructional coach to select the most appropriate form of assistance based on the career needs of the teachers assigned to her and to include modeling, observation, and supportive critique as deemed appropriate (Poglinco et al, 2003). Technical or expert coaching is needed when teachers are learning a new skill and transfer of the strategy is expected. Peer and cognitive coaching are utilized with teachers that are becoming more proficient with a skill under study and need ongoing dialogue about the practice. The support provided can be procedural, emotional or reflective, depending on teacher individual needs (Swafford, 1998). Cognitive coaching is also often referred to as

collegial coaching since the focus is on giving teachers a forum for metacognitively considering the practices they are following, while doing this within a supportive atmosphere. Challenge coaching involves looking at a problem from a variety of perspectives within the context of a team in an effort to solve any problem defined by the participants relative to curriculum instructional techniques, classroom management, and other pertinent issues within the school setting (Barkley, 2005). This differentiation of instruction for meeting teacher needs is designed to yield maximum benefits and includes the components of the Intentional Teaching Model, which includes collecting data to describe the conditions of learning, determining the most appropriate instructional delivery method, and making time for interactive instructional planning that involves in-class demonstrations/ observations and out of class sessions to discuss strategy and analyze student work (Rock, 2002).

The instructional coaches function as change and content coaches within the school assigned. A change coach assists the principal in recruiting and training teacher leaders by modeling leadership skills and helping other educators develop the capacity to effect change in the school. A content coach focuses on training teachers to implement best practice instructional strategies, providing suggestions and feedback, assisting with development of lesson plans and finding materials, holding study groups, training new teachers, and adapting to teacher needs (Aspen Institute, 2003).

Use of the term best practices within this study refers to research based teaching strategies that yield greater student output, as opposed to traditional methods of

instructional delivery. Instructional coaches are often used by schools to assist teachers in acquiring skill in implementing such changes in teaching practice. Additionally, best practice teaching strategies are sometimes studied within schools within the context of book studies or in discussions within a professional learning situation designed by the administration. After reading about and discussing a new teaching strategy, teachers are expected to try the new tactic within the classroom. This could include approaches such as use of a balanced literacy program, instruction using graphic organizers, use of cooperative grouping techniques, teaching summarization or notetaking skills in a designated format, utilization of the writing process, integration of a new technology into the curriculum, mapping the curriculum to pace it appropriately while meeting required content and process standards, and implementing an integrated or thematic unit approach to teaching (Marzano, 2001).

For the purpose of this study, collaborative leadership refers to any school improvement team that evolves within the school as a part of a reform effort. Usually, this takes the form of an action planning team with a defined task to perform. The shared sense of commitment to the undertaking assigned yields a sense of community that breaks down the isolation felt by many educators and often leads to the development of relationships that have a positive influence on the school. Individuals on a collaborative leadership team work together to exercise leadership within the school. Many reform models have as a required component a collaborative leadership effort (Sparks, 2002).

A professional learning community is engineered by the administration within a school building, often in collaboration with a leadership team, to address the learning needs unique to the building in which the group functions together. Teachers within such a learning community will often share lessons, observe each other in teaching, study student work and collectively seek ways to improve it, read professional books together, discuss pertinent issues in search of a collective solution, encourage one another, attend training together, and work on improvement issues in a planned format (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004).

Summary/Overview

Coaching in the instructional setting is designed to empower teachers to use their expertise to take initiative in effecting improvement in student achievement. The increase in collegiality facilitates teacher learning, and ultimately leads to greater student and school success as teachers become agents of change in the school (Cochran & DeChesere, 1995). Many studies have been done across the nation since the early 1980's to substantiate the effectiveness of coaching and have documented increased teacher competence in the classroom, improved teacher communication, and an increased understanding of curriculum across the school (Arnau, Kahrs & Kriskamp, 2004; Boston Plan, 2003; Duggan, 2002; Edwards & Green, 1999; Hall & McKeen, 1991). However, few studies have shown how teachers and administrators perceive the role of the instructional coach within the school setting or addressed the concerns of these constituent groups, as is the intended purpose of this study.

Since ninety percent of a new skill learned will transfer into practice if learned along with theory, demonstration, practice, and coaching, it is incumbent upon school administrators to devise ways to fund in-school professional development opportunities for teachers, inclusive of full time coaches on staff. The benefits to school progress through enhanced understanding and use of best practices, augmented ability to analyze lessons, increased repertoire of strategies, improved collegiality, and a more positive and cohesive school climate are worth the effort (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Joyce & Showers, 1995).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In a report entitled *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future contended in 1996 that, "teacher expertise is the single most important determinant of student achievement" and that "...each dollar spent on recruiting high quality teachers and deepening their knowledge and skills nets greater gains in student learning than any other use of an educational dollar" (Henderson Prystash, 2003; National Commission, 1996).

Many models for professional development have been attempted by school districts over the years, including mentorship programs, single day training sessions, book studies, training with follow up activities, demonstrating model lessons, examination of assignments or student work, implementation of a reform model, activities designed to foster a professional learning community, and various coaching strategies. In point of fact, researchers had been discussing the impact of coaching on the staying power of professional development services since the 1970's when Joyce and Showers (1983) conducted initial research indicating that teachers retain and use strategies for which they receive coaching after attending a training session. In the 1980's, these early findings were validated and in the 1990's, a burst of research on the

topic indicated definitively that job embedded professional development delivered by an instructional coach at the local school site is the most effective method of improving teacher competence. Since the year 2000, research on the issue has become more specific, resulting in foundations funding implementation of instructional coaches in at-risk schools, professional organizations touting the necessity for such job embedded professional development, and considerable amounts of federal dollars being spent on hiring instructional coaches, particularly in the area of reading. Federally funded research organizations, such as the Southern Regional Education Board, Mid-Continent Research in Education Lab, and the Northeast Research in Education Lab, have studies the effectiveness of instructional coaches and determined that the expenditure of funds for such a tool for school reform is worthy. Organizations such as the National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP), American Association for School Administrators (AASA), National Staff Development Council (NSDC) and American Association for Curriculum Development (ASCD) have published numerous articles indicating the need for educators to utilize this proven method for increasing teacher competence in an effort to improve student achievement levels. Considering these facts, it is incumbent upon local school administrators to heed the preponderance of evidence and change professional development delivery systems to include strategies that are research based and, thereby, known to be effective. This would place the use of job embedded professional development, inclusive of instructional coaching models, at the top of the priority list for training services needed by teachers.

This chapter will address the role or job function of instructional coaches, hiring practices, various coaching models, the most recent standards established for instructional coaches by professional educational organizations, known hindrances to success, the link of instructional coaching to student learning, a list of elements necessary for success of any instructional coaching programs, other types of job embedded professional development models, and a discussion of pedagogy as developed traditionally versus through the influence of a coach.

Role or Job Function of Instructional Coaches

To be able to implement any instructional coaching model in local school districts as a strategy intended to positively impact professional growth of teachers, it is important to clarify the role or job function of the coach as it pertains to the specific school or district being served. Generally, an instructional coach identifies and meets the needs of teachers by developing a non-evaluative professional learning community in which district initiatives are clearly communicated and resources to reach goals set are provided (Ezarik, 2002; Walpole, 2004). The coach, who should be trained to work with adult learners, leads dialogue about student learning, listens as teachers reflect on professional practices, advocates for high expectations, organizes a support system, and assists teachers in using data to make decisions (Duggan, 2002). These efforts work in tandem to break down the isolation often felt by teaching professionals and works toward deepening subject matter and pedagogical knowledge and expertise of teachers, thereby having a positive impact on student learning.

In study of the recent trend toward placing instructional coaches or specialists within local schools for the purpose of working with teachers, the Southern Regional Education Board found that the technical assistance provided by the coach is the best way to assist districts in meeting district goals while helping teachers gain personal competence within the profession. Once a bond of trust is established between the teacher and the coach, an effective sounding board is established, which allows for honest assessment and assistance on specific areas of instructional need (Barkley, 2005; Southern Regional Education Board, 2000). As part of the study of the effectiveness of the Reading First initiative, which is part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the Southern Regional Education Board came to several conclusions that should impact the way professional development is delivered to teaching professionals within school districts. Basically, extensive research into the effectiveness of the United States Department of Education supported Reading First program indicates that it is imperative that entire faculties be trained and provided follow-up technical support from a specialist that can work directly with the teacher in the classroom. This model appears to be the most effective single strategy in increasing student performance and improving teacher competence. Additionally, training teachers to help each other solve problems by participating in peer coaching sessions can decrease isolation. Involving teachers in follow-up sessions with coaches who can provide feedback and reinforcement increases teacher fluency in utilization of best practice teaching strategies learned. Many states within the south are instituting coaches within schools for a specific purpose. In

Arkansas, instructional coaches work with novice teachers within the classroom to model, monitor teacher progress and assist teachers in making adjustments in instruction as needed. Virginia and North Carolina have recently increased funding for instructional coaches once it was determined that coaches must stay within a school for an extended time to re-teach and reinforce changes that teachers are being asked to make (Southern Regional Education Board, 2003). School districts in low-performing schools in Mississippi are beginning to include instructional coaches within the models chosen for comprehensive school reform. The America's Choice model touted in many educational circles requires instructional coaches as a major component of implementing this school reform model. In a study conducted by the National Center on Education and the Economy for the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, the America's Choice coaching model was found to increase the use of readers and writers workshop and standards based instructional practices among hundreds of participating schools (Poglinco et al, 2003). Other comprehensive school reform models also tout the use of coaches to guide and support change through the specialized leadership provided by instructional coaches (Taylor, 2004).

Coaches often serve as a motivating force within the school, acting as cheerleader when teachers are overwhelmed by the stresses of the job or have not internalized the strategy or information that is being emphasized by the school. Coaches provide observation and feedback to teachers at each point in the learning cycle, thereby motivating teachers to continue in their quest for learning from the survival phase,

through the efforts to belong to a group and exercise some degree of personal power, to the level characterized by a sense of competence that engenders a tendency to have fun trying the new strategy or stepping out of the comfort zone. In this way, coaches empower or motivate teachers to take professional risks and enjoy the consequences (Barkley, 2005).

Negotiation is often a large part of the function of an innovative, effective instructional coach. Teachers come to their jobs from a variety of training institutions, with a diversity of belief systems, and with disparate skills in pedagogy and grasp of content. Hence, the instructional coach must become practiced in identifying conceptual, pedagogical, and cultural differences and co-opting that knowledge into a plan for altering a teacher's personal viewpoints within the context of learning and what is best for students. Creating opportunities for relevant, pointed, and passionate conversations about educational issues between coach and teachers is a key element in forming the relationships necessary for clear communication and furthering the agenda of the school (Barkley, 2005). This ability to handle meaningful conversations or negotiations often must be learned by the instructional coach within the job setting, making it obvious that results may not be readily apparent with only one year of implementation (Windschitl, 2002). However, progress can become apparent within a short period of time if instructional coaches are properly prepared for the task at hand and teachers within the school served are aware of the program, its intent, and the role of the coach (Neufeld & Roper, 2002).

Practices for Hiring Instructional Coaches

There are no clear cut guidelines for hiring instructional coaches for schools. Even though several states have instituted coaching programs that target schools in need, the hiring process entails the same basic components as is included in the hiring practices of most professional educator positions, including completion of an application, review of the teaching resume, and an interview process. In states such as Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina that employ instructional coaches that serve local schools, the hiring process generally comprises the usual components with the interview process weighing heavily in the determination phase. These states impose mandatory training on coaches hired prior to their beginning to offer services at the assigned school, with follow-up trainings also required (National Staff Development Council, 2004; Southern Region Education Board, 2003). Local school districts that hire coaches typically follow the same practices as states, requiring an application screening process followed by extensive interviews (Boston Plan, 2003).

Whether hired at the state or local level, the qualities that employers are looking for in instructional coaches include personal and professional skills that are described in the standards written by the International Reading Association, which include leadership competencies as a collaborator, an evaluator of literacy and instructional needs, and a communicator of instructional strategies for effective delivery of content (Russo, 2004). In many cases, the institutions hiring an instructional coach use the job description written for the particular task that needs to be addressed within their building as a

primary factor in selecting the appropriate coach for the school. Schools that are looking primarily for literacy coaches select individuals with strong backgrounds in reading instruction, while schools in need of coaches that can analyze data choose individuals with skill in synthesizing various data sources and reaching instructional and curricular decisions that can impact student learning (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003). Most schools look for teachers well versed in pedagogy and content but that have the capability to work with adults effectively. This requires skill in developing a culture of collaboration while maintaining the ability to challenge a fellow educator to engage in purposeful reflective practice (Barkley, 2005).

Coaching Models

There are many coaching models from which a skilled instructional coach can choose when formulating an appropriate approach to influencing practices at a school or in an individual teacher's classroom. In each model selected, the instructional coach must take the leadership role and guide the experience so that the teachers involved will deepen their content and/or pedagogical knowledge within a supportive professional environment during the school day. Further, the teachers being trained should have the opportunity to practice, research and reflect with other educators in order to enhance the chance of transfer of the skill to the classroom. The models most conducive to changing teacher practice are study groups, collaborative type opportunities, mentorship/internship experiences, and contact with experts in teaching, such as instructional coaches located within the school (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Sparks, 2002; Toll, 2005).

School-based coaching provides teachers access to a highly skilled instructor with whom they can discuss instructional needs and questions, observe then practice new techniques, and get technical feedback without the fear of showing their supervisor instructional weaknesses (Joyce & Showers, 1995). There are many models under which coaching can be accomplished and they are described as follows:

- lesson study - requires that teachers collaborate as a study team to develop a lesson, observe it being taught, and discuss ways to refine it;
- peer coaching - a non-evaluative reciprocal process in which teachers are paired to discuss and share a strategy, observe each other and provide mutual support;
- cognitive coaching - involves reflection, observation and asking questions of a coach after being taught specific skills;
- technical or expert coaching - involves the transfer of ideas learned in professional development into practice
- challenge coaching - focuses on solving a persistent educational problem collaboratively;
- critical friends group - meets regularly to reflect on practice and analyze student work;
- learning walk - teachers look at student work and classroom artifacts and talk with students prior to participating in a discussion about observations made with the teacher involved

- mentoring involves experienced teachers being trained to help beginning educator.

A coach is expected to select and implement the optimal coaching strategy that best fits the teaching population served. This requires great skill and insight (Bambino, 2002; Black, Molseek & Sayler, 2003; Cushman, 1998; Duggan, 2002; Hall & McKeen, 1991; Huling, 2000; Israel, 2003; Poglinco et al, 2003; Reiman & Peace, 2002).

The generalized purpose of an instructional coach being placed within a school is to improve student achievement by changing teacher practices. Crane (2002) views transformational coaching as being divided into three distinct phases. In the foundational phase, a coach must connect with her constituents, set expectations, observe what is present in the environment and prepare people for change. All then enter the learning loop as a unified group by respectfully and reflectively listening to each other, asking learning questions, sharing perceptions of performance, and participating as the group states its purpose and intentions for change. In phase three, the coach leads the group in forwarding the action into plan implementation and follow-up evaluation, providing necessary support along the journey. The momentum for change within the school happens only through careful design in moving through these defined steps to create a strong culture for professional learning. Daily, focused conversations between the coach and the teachers cultivates this feeling of community and yields positive results as every teacher, whether experienced or novice, can learn what they need to know while staying on the job site. Following a defined model in dealing with groups of teachers may assist

in relaxing the coach to teacher relationship as all will know the expectations and procedural protocol (Hargrove, 1995; Mednick, 2004; Schmoker, 2004).

Standards for Instructional Coaching

Realizing that coaches are a necessary professional development tool in middle and high schools, the International Reading Association, in collaboration with the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the National Science Teachers Association, and the National Council for the Social Studies, published a document entitled, *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches* in January, 2006, to outline four key competencies needed by instructional coaches in the secondary schools. These standards were meant to complement the previously published guidelines issued by the International Reading Association (2003) in which standards for reading coaches in general and specific to elementary schools were detailed.

The standards espoused for middle and high school coaches by the International Reading Association are a goal to which all coaches should strive to attain, though few will embody all the standards fully upon hiring and will require professional development during their employment to sharpen their skills (Russo, 2004). The standards include leadership competencies, which apply to all coaching situations regardless of the content area addressed, and content area competencies, which are specific to language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The standards are paraphrased as follows:

Leadership Standards

STANDARD 1: Skillful Collaborators – instructional coaches are skilled collaborators who function effectively in the school setting.

STANDARD 2: Skillful Job Embedded Coaches – instructional coaches are skilled in the core content areas of language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.

STANDARD 3: Skillful Evaluators of Literacy Needs – instructional coaches are skilled evaluators of literacy needs within various subject areas and are able to collaborate with school leadership teams and teachers to interpret and use assessment data to inform instruction.

Content Area Standard

STANDARD 4: Skillful Instructional Strategists – instructional coaches are accomplished teachers who are skilled in developing and implementing instructional strategies to improve academic literacy in the specific content area.

The standards are further explained by the International Reading Association (2006) through a list of elements that detail what is meant by each standard. Then under each element listed, a number of specific performance expectations are denoted. These details were developed over a year and a half of study by the five collaborating organizations and are intended to assist school districts in their efforts to implement effective instructional coaching programs.

The first leadership standard involves interpersonal skills that are necessary for true collaboration with others, including the ability to listen actively, question strategically, solve problems as a team, and reflect on capabilities while building trusting relationships. The specific elements for standard 1 (skillful collaborators) are paraphrased as follows:

Element 1.1 – instructional coaches work with the school’s team to determine the school’s strengths and needs for improvement in the area of literacy in order to improve students’ reading, writing, and communication skills and content area achievement. Performance strategies include, but are not limited to, collaborating with the school leadership team, designing opportunities for small group discussion on relevant issues, guiding discussions to be goal oriented or needs based, and aligning curriculum along with teachers.

Element 1.2 – instructional coaches promote productive relationships with and among school staff. Performance strategies include, but are not limited to, showcasing best practices examples noted within the school, respecting confidentiality issues, separating functions so teachers see that the coach is not their supervisor, and responding promptly to requests for assistance.

Element 1.3 – instructional coaches strengthen their own professional teaching knowledge, skills and strategies. Some of the performance strategies are staying current with latest research and literature, examining best practices, remaining open to new ideas, and attending professional growth opportunities.

The second leadership standard addresses skillful job-embedded strategies used by the instructional coaches to assist teachers in the core content areas. Specific elements for standard 2 are restated as follows:

Element 2.1 – instructional coaches work with teachers individually, in teams, and/or in departments to provide practical support on a full range of reading, writing, and communication strategies. Performance strategies could include, but are not limited to, collaboration for textbook or material selection, providing professional development on metacognitive strategies, modeling scaffolding procedures or reading strategies, and assisting with research and writing instruction.

Element 2.2 – instructional coaches observe and provide feedback to teachers on instruction and content area knowledge. Performance strategies could include observing classroom procedures prior to discussing instructional issues with an individual teacher, collecting and sharing data on student engagement, participating in reflective dialogue with teachers, and providing demonstration lessons along with support for the teacher to attempt the strategy.

Leadership standard number three indicates that instructional coaches must be skillful evaluators of needs within different subject areas and be able to work with teachers to use assessment data to direct instructional change. Specific elements for standard 2 are summarized as follows:

Element 3.1 – instructional coaches lead faculty in selecting and using a range of assessment tools in order to make sound choices regarding student curricular and instructional needs. Performance strategies include, but are not limited to, developing a schedule for formative and summative assessments, showing teachers how to standardize scoring of writing, and keeping abreast of current research on assessment methodology.

Element 3.2 – instructional coaches support reflection and action by conducting regular meetings with teachers to examine student work and monitor progress. Performance standards could include moving teachers through a standardized system for analysis of student work, such as the Standards in Practice model developed by The Education Trust or the format developed by Phil Schlechty and detailed in his book entitled, *Working on the Work*.

Standard number four is a content standard and addresses skillful use of instructional strategies to improve reading and writing processes within a specific content. A different element and performance strategies are written within the document for language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, yet all are similar with the main difference being the denotation of the specific content area. Generally, the elements are as follows:

Element 4.1 – instructional coaches know how reading and writing processes intersect with the discipline (of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies). Performance strategies within each discipline include understanding

the standards of that professional organization, relating adolescent development issues to teachers, knowing the specific demands for reading within that discipline, thinking processes that assist in analysis within that content area, and use of various visual and other aids to learning.

Element 4.2 – instructional coaches have multiple comprehension strategies that help content area teachers in developing active and competent readers within the subject area. Specific performance strategies applicable to each discipline include understanding text structure, matching instructional methods to the content, modeling strategies that improve student engagement, and knowing strategies for supporting students in the process of representing ideas appropriately within that subject area.

The purpose of stating these standards along with accompanying detail on performance requirements is to promote a shared understanding of what coaches can accomplish within a school setting if given proper administrative support. In addition, the standards developed by the International Reading Association, along with collaborative organizations, are intended to assist in further defining the role, responsibilities, and qualifications necessary to perform the prescribed functions of an instructional coach.

Hindrances to Success

As with any tool used in a complex educational setting, there are hindrances to success of any strategy employed. Instructional coaching is no exception. Since there is

no single job description for the position, there may be a period of unease as administrators, coaches and teachers settle on the exact role of the coach within the school culture. Coaches may feel that their task is unclear as they are not really a teacher, nor are they an administrator (Podlinco et al, 2003). Resistance may develop from veteran teachers, particularly those at the high school level, who are satisfied with the status quo and who may become defensive when approached by the coach regarding new teaching practices. These issues may lead to a feeling of separation by the coach from the rest of the staff (Aspen Institute, 2003; Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003).

Selection of these school based staff developers is an inexact science. It is obviously necessary that the instructional coach be considered experienced and even expert in a content field and in pedagogical strategies in order for teachers to develop trust and respect. Further, the coach should be well grounded in application of adult learning theory and communication skills. When these elements are missing, a teacher may have difficulty transitioning from the role of teacher to coach. Other personality traits that are useful are a calm disposition, an innovative spirit, determination, and the ability to mediate and build trust. Finding teachers with these skills may be difficult, especially if districts maintain salaries at the same level as teachers in an effort to avoid creating a divide between teachers and coaches. Such teacher leaders may prefer to remain in the classroom with students, rather than put themselves on the line with their peers.

The principal can create success or failure of a coaching program. It is essential that the leader of the school speak positively about the coach and support efforts made. The principal must allocate time for the coach and teachers to meet and must allow access to resources and data necessary for school improvement. Likewise, it is essential that district level administrators openly support the coaching program and work toward assuring its success through adequate, stable funding and provision of resources needed for accomplishment of goals set (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003; Norton, 1999; Poglinco et al, 2003; Swafford, 1998). Should the actions of the principal lead teachers to believe that the coach serves in an evaluative capacity or as part of the teacher assessment team, an oppositional relationship can develop between teachers and the coach, constraining any positive benefits that could have been realized (International Reading Association, 2006).

Coaches at the secondary level face unique challenges as they usually serve more teachers in a wide variety of content area departments, as compared with primary level coaches. Additionally, teachers in secondary courses usually do not see themselves as teachers of reading or writing, preferring to consider their function as content specific (Sturtevant, 2003). This makes it more difficult for the instructional coach to assist the teacher in improving the progress of students whose deficits can only be improved by addressing literacy issues first. Further, needs of students at the secondary level are more widely discrepant and compounded by motivational problems, complicating the task even

more as the coach must address the need for differentiated instruction with educators unfamiliar with the procedures of this strategy (International Reading Association, 2006).

Finding time within the school day for collaboration on school improvement issues with other professionals within the building is difficult for teachers, even with coaches present (Barkley, 2005). However, as site-based accountability increases, principals and teachers will increasingly seek ways to allocate time to meet to discuss pedagogical and content issues that will lead to improved student performance.

Administrative leaders must work to create a coalition within the school culture that is not merely supportive of positive change but determined to make a difference through directed actions (Schlechty, 2002). This can be accomplished when time is set aside to thoughtfully build a professional learning community in which teachers have opportunities to lead and demonstrate their expertise (Buckner & McDowelle, 2000); Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000).

Link to Student Achievement

Little research exists proving a relationship between utilization of instructional coaching in schools and student achievement gains (Aspen Institute, 2003; Poglinco et al, 2003). Most qualitative and quantitative studies done on the issue measure effectiveness by noting change in teacher utilization of new practices or reporting the degree of teacher satisfaction when coaches are available (Edwards & Green, 1999; Godinez, 2003; Hopkins, 2003; Kohler & Crilley, 1997; McLymont & da Costa, 1988; Poglinco et al, 2003), ignoring student outcomes. Some research findings indicate that student

achievement does gain ground when teachers assume mutual responsibility for learning, as happens in coaching situations where dialogue about content and practices is prevalent (Cushman, 1998; Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003). Other studies indicate that students are more attentive and involved in lessons in schools that have a coaching approach to professional development (Sparks & Bruder, 1987). There are a few studies that link gains in standardized test scores to the existence of coaching in the schools impacted (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003).

Some studies indicate that coaching increases teacher skills, whether the teacher is preservice, low-performing or experienced (Burkhart, 2004; Morgan & Menlove, 1994; Victoria University, 2002). Additionally, retention of beginning teachers has been shown to improve in districts with teacher coaches, as the level of support for the novice can be personalized to need and is non-evaluative (Griffin, Wohlsetter & Bharadwaja, 2001). Teachers who develop a relationship with an instructional coach generally perceive a greater responsibility for and control over their own professional growth, are willing to share methodology and resources, and consider themselves more effective than teachers lacking contact with a coach (McCourt, 2000). Increasing instructional capacity of teachers is considered to be a prerequisite to impacting student achievement (Aspen Institute, 2003), giving credence to the contention of many teachers who were coached that student performance improved because they became more skilled (North Central Regional Education Lab, 2003).

The educational climate caused by statewide testing and national accountability, with the passage of the No Child Left Behind federal legislation, has motivated administrators to reconsider staff development programs and seek to link efforts to specific reforms needed (Godinez, 2003). Job-embedded professional development that is customized, focused and relevant to participants will undoubtedly increase in utilization (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003; North Central Regional Education Lab, 2003). As early as the 1970's, research by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers has indicated that teachers retain and implement strategies at a ninety percent rate if they are provided with coaching after instruction. Studies across subsequent years have bolstered that original contention, making it apparent that policy and practice must change to fit this knowledge base so that teachers can better develop and teach for understanding and improved student performance (Cohen, McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993).

Elements Necessary for Success of Coaching Programs

Elements that are necessary for the success of any instructional coaching program include effective skills of the coach, adequate preparation of the coach, and proper conditions within the district and local school environment. The skills required of a coach fall into two categories: interpersonal and professional. The human relations skills required include flexibility, the ability to listen and offer friendly yet useful guidance, an inclusive attitude that lends toward accessibility, persistence, commitment to task even when obstacles are placed in the path, and questioning skills that develop trust through the manner and timing delivered. Professionally, the coach must have a deep

understanding of subject matter and curriculum, be expert in pedagogical knowledge and classroom management techniques, and be aware of ways to access multiple resources in order to generate respect and cooperation (Feger, Woleck & Hickman, 2004; Poglinco et al, 2003). Additionally, it is necessary for a coach to be skilled in listening strategies and open-ended questioning techniques so that a dialogue that is nurturing can evolve (Barkley, 2005).

Adequate preparation for the task as a coach is necessary for success. Coaches need training and practice in data analysis, problem solving techniques, and classroom organization (“Coaching Teachers to”; Edwards & Green, 1999). It is also essential that instructional coaches be well versed in adult learning theory and current research on teaching practices (Bartunek, 2002). Meeting with other coaches at regular intervals and following up training with explicit practice are useful tools in the training of coaches (Brandt, 1987). Instructional coaches must understand the big picture of reform for the district and school, making it advantageous to orient these professionals to issues specific to the district separate from other teachers and in greater depth so their assistance can be solicited. Differentiating the training of experienced coaches from that received by novice coaches and training some coaches to be coach leaders is also recommended (Aspen Institute, 2003; Neufeld & Roper, 2003).

The primary condition within a district and local school setting necessary to effectively support instructional coaching efforts is internal (local school) and external (district level) administrative support, inclusive of setting expectations and specific roles

with limits and possibilities, providing a supportive environment in which teachers have time to participate, proper training and selection of exemplary coaches, and adequate funding (Aspen Institute, 2003; Boston Plan, 2003; Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003; Ezarik, 2002; Galm & Perry, 2004; Ireland, 2003; Kelleher, 2002; Moore - Hankerson, 2004; National Commission on Teaching, 1996; Shen, 2001). One caveat regarding the conditions essential for success of school-based professional developers is the necessity of insuring that the coach pushes district initiatives and is not swayed by local school personalities or diversions that may hinder accomplishment of the larger objectives defined by the district level administrative entity (Cochran & DeChesere, 1995). In addition, instructional coaches must be supported by the principal, be trained well and be a part of a support group of individuals with similar job responsibilities in order to maintain a level of quality performance (Feger, Woleck & Hickman, 2004; Peyton, 2003; Russo, 2004). A successful coach will be afforded the tools necessary to create the deliberate focus, shared understandings and reflective dialogue necessary to bring about change in the learning environment (Foulfer, 2004; Fullan, 1993; Robbins, 1991).

Other Job Embedded Professional Development Models

No single strategy can solve the myriad problems that face the teaching profession, nor be credited for being the salvation for failing schools, as most schools and districts employ multiple techniques simultaneously. Instructional coaching is one such strategy typically utilized in schools that have recognized a need to improve teacher

competence in order to raise student achievement levels. Hence, the school is usually following some defined reform model, is often analyzing teacher assignments and student work regularly, and sometimes is working to develop a climate conducive to fostering a true professional learning community.

School Reform Via Professional Development

School reform efforts are more complex than simply addressing the professional development needs of the teaching staff, though training teachers in improving instructional strategies used with students is found in most school improvement initiatives. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the National Association of Secondary School Principals commissioned a study that culminated in 2001 with the publication of *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*. This work embodies several priorities for renewing or reforming schools. Addressing teacher professional development needs is a primary concern. Emphasizing the need to have appropriate curriculum and instructional strategies that engage students in their own learning while helping them make connections to real life points to the necessity of properly preparing teachers to undertake these tasks. Further, the report indicates that students must be challenged to utilize technology in their learning. Teachers must, then, be well trained to handle this endeavor. The assessment and accountability piece in the study also indicates that teachers must be adept with alternate assessment methodology and should be held accountable for student progress. Other priorities within the study require the principal to work toward a school climate that is conducive to learning and to

restructure time and space in order to improve the learning experiences of students. An entire section of the report is devoted to defining how teachers need to find a support network in their efforts to reach the defined priority goals. Professional development is considered key in this process, with teachers having a personal learning plan that someone within the school community assists them with meeting, whether that be the principal, a fellow teacher or a coach (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2001).

The Southern Regional Education Board has defined strategies that work in improving schools. These include raising expectations placed on students, increasing student engagement, providing sustained professional development, attending to organizational practices that support student learning, building community linkages, and accelerating improvement through data driven decision-making and accountability. Within this reform process, professional development is viewed as the vehicle for reaching the defined agenda. Coaching and mentoring are two mechanisms for reaching the goal of preparing teachers properly to instruct students effectively (Southern Regional Education Board, 2001). This organization advocates teacher internship programs as a training tool (Southern Regional Education Board, 2005) and provides training to school districts twice annually on developing quality coaching programs.

One of the recommendations of The Alliance for Excellent Education (2002) was that federal funds be dedicated to supporting professional development programs that target training teachers through various coaching models, including lesson study, as well

as mentorship and coaching programs. Upgrading teacher quality through a variety of means will assist schools in reaching the goal of providing the best education to all students.

Examining Teacher Assignments and Student Work

Examining student work assists a teacher in knowing what a particular individual has learned. Further, an instructor can ascertain problems with the teaching presented to students by looking for common errors between student papers. Recent research has been done on deepening this practice by looking at the actual written assignment and the physical product produced by the student. Schlechty (2002) espouses twelve standards by which a teacher should judge her written assignment. They are:

- **Pattern of Engagement:** a teacher should design the pattern of activity in the classroom so that students are authentically engaged in the task;
- **Student Achievement:** the teacher should be aware of the level of each student and formulate the type of learning accordingly;
- **Content and Substance:** a teacher must have a clear understanding of what students are expected to know and be able to do upon exit from her class;
- **Organization of Knowledge:** a teacher must ensure that materials used to present information, ideas, and concepts to students are organized in a way that appeals to personal interests and sensibilities of the majority of students and that students have the skill to use the materials;

- Product Focus: a teacher designs an assignment that is clear so students know what to do and the assignment should have relevance to the students;
- Clear and Compelling Product: a teacher makes certain that students projects, performances, or exhibitions meet the standards set;
- Safe Environment; a teacher maintains a physically and psychologically safe place in her classroom;
- Affirmation of Performances: a teacher affirms the presentation of knowledge by the student;
- Affiliation: a teacher provide opportunities for students to work with others on products, performances and exhibitions;
- Novelty and Variety: a teacher makes certain that students understand how to create a variety of products and what would be novel;
- Choice: a teacher gives students considerable choice or options in what to do to prove learning of a defined standard;
- Authenticity: a teacher designs the task assigned to students such that the student perceives it to have meaning in his life.

Teachers can accomplish the task of analyzing their assignments individually or in collaborative groups using the “Working on the Work” model devised by Phillip Schlechty. Additionally, teachers can follow the six step “Standards in Practice (SIP)” process developed by The Education Trust to examine assignments made. The SIP

process requires that a teacher present her assignment to a panel of teachers, that those teachers read the written assignment to ascertain what students are being asked to do, that those same teachers locate the standards that the assignment covers, that the teachers write a rubric to judge the assignment then read student papers to ascertain whether or not students were proficient with the task, and that the teachers rewrite the assignment so that it is clear to students or assist the teachers with defining the next step in the instructional process. In either case, teachers must be trained in the process and a consistent leader must be present in the early stages of following the process to assure understanding. Often, a principal, consultant, coach, or teacher trained from within the staff has this responsibility.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities are becoming more prevalent in schools as educational leaders become aware of the potential for positive change within a process that engages teachers and administrators at one site as collective learners for a defined purpose. A professional learning community is a supportive environment where leadership is shared and teachers apply what is learned then reflect on its success. The characteristics of successful professional learning communities are:

- Supportive and shared leadership: the principal shares leadership, power and authority by asking for staff input and using it in decision making;
- Shared values and vision: all within the school are committed to student learning and have an articulated vision;

- Collective learning and application to learning: all school staff seek new knowledge together and apply that learning to find solutions that address student needs;
- Supportive conditions: the physical needs are met and human capacity utilized to sustain a collegial atmosphere;
- Shared practice: teachers review the behavior of their colleagues and give feedback and assistance to support improvement of each individual.

Though having an instructional coach to lead this process of building a community of educators dedicated to inquiry and reflection would be helpful, it is not essential as the principal or an assigned faculty member can assume the leadership role (Clarke, Bossange, Erb C., Nelligan B., & Sullivan M, 2000; Hord, 2004).

Each of the job embedded professional development models mentioned can be considered through the lens of teacher empowerment as each is designed to assist teachers with assuming some level of leadership within the school community. When teachers believe that their knowledge is valued and they have some input in the decisions made within the school, the level of investment in the school increases, thereby positively impacting teacher retention and job satisfaction. However, teacher empowerment should not be considered sufficient in making real changes in teacher pedagogy that affects student learning as classroom practice may not change. It is important that the professional development strategies utilized in a school focus on classroom practice as well as school wide issues and that teachers realize that the learning requires

improvement in quality of practice, not simply good feelings toward the community of teachers and administrators working together (Childs-Bowen, D., Moller, G., Shrivner, J., 2000; Ingersoll, R., 2003; Marks, H. M. & Louis, K. S., 1997).

Pedagogical Development Through Instructional Coaching

Pedagogical style and strategies employed by teaching professional develop over time and are greatly affected by the way the person teaching received instruction as a learner. As the lecture and discussion modes were most widespread in secondary and post-secondary educational environments for many years, this style of teaching is comfortable for many of veteran educators. To add to the instructional repertoire, teachers often need a model to observe, someone to observe them as they attempt the new strategy, and constructive feedback. This can be obtained through an instructional coach if one is available within the school district as a professional development tool. Key to the success of changing teacher pedagogy is the recognition that assistance delivered to teaching professionals must be differentiated to fit the direct needs of the learner. Also, it is imperative that the core beliefs and strengths of the teachers involved be utilized in the change process. If the coach is strategic about providing clear information and a preponderance of evidence to back the need for change, teacher resistance will decline and beliefs can shift. Once the individual needs and questions of the teacher are addressed adequately and at the right pace, the teacher will begin to relate the learning to problems encountered personally within the classroom. This leads to deep reflection about practice, collaboration to learn more, and change or adaptation of pedagogical style

as well as addition of instructional strategy employment (Kise, 2006). According to the National Staff Development Council (2004), teachers have different learning styles and strengths, making it necessary for professional growth opportunities include observation of best practices as well as the chance to attempt the strategy and receive feedback.

Scaffolding of the learning to fit the teacher learner leads to change in teaching behavior. Development of improved pedagogical skills of teachers must be accomplished in a variety of ways, depending on the learning style, preferences and belief structure of the teacher. An effective instructional coach gauges the situation and teacher learner then matches the strategies used to the teacher to maximize results and provide differentiation. This models to teachers what a successful teacher does for her students plus paves the way for desired change. Kise (2006) postulates that teachers will modify their pedagogical style if approached in an appropriate manner and , thereby, has defined four effective coaching styles that should be matched to the learner:

1. Coach as Useful Resource – For some teachers, the coach needs to tailor information provided to the teacher so that it has relevance to their lessons immediately.
2. Coach as Encouraging Sage – The coach will be expected by some teachers to provide on-the-spot suggestions to problems presented, model lessons, give encouragement, and follow-up with next step ideas. Teachers that need this type of support may be overwhelmed if more than one strategy is given and prefer concrete tasks with targeted issues and few choices.

3. Coach as Collegial Mentor – Some teaching professionals need a listening ear and someone to converse with about a problem so that they can generate their own solutions to the stated problem. A mentor is also expected to provide constructive feedback and assistance with structuring lessons, assessments and procedures.
4. Coach as Expert – In some cases, teachers prefer a coach with enough depth of knowledge to answer their queries in a manner that instills trust and confidence. Teachers that prefer this type coach may probe and question the coach until a full understanding is reached. Hence, it is imperative that the coach not be offended by intellectual challenge.

Summary

Today's schools need school-based reformers so that conversations can be created among teachers about their craft, thereby improving performance of the school (Sparks, 2002). Instructional coaches can develop the relationships necessary to create and sustain such collaborative spirit within the local school and can provide a continual cycle of professional development so that new teachers that enter the school can receive consistent training and, therefore, participate fully in the mission of the school at large (Brown & Moffett, 1999). The challenges faced by instructional coaches are great but the rewards, when successful, are worthy as they are measured in improved teacher effectiveness and increased student achievement levels.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

When school level administrators within the third largest school district in Mississippi recognized that teachers were experiencing difficulty implementing best practice instructional strategies presented to them during professional development workshop sessions, district officials began to search for a model for training educational professionals that would be more effective. Instructional coaching was described in several sources investigated by the district as an effective model for bringing about positive change in teaching practice (Guskey, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 1995; Robb, 2000; Southern Regional Education Board, 2000; Sparks & Hirsch, 1999). Hence, it was determined that an instructional coaching program would be launched at the four lowest performing schools within the district. When the arrangement proved effective and principals began to demand the same training advantage, instructional coaches were placed in all eight attendance zones within the district the next school year.

This study focuses on how instructional coaching yielded modification of teaching strategy and instructional practices at two schools housing an instructional coach over a three year period. Teacher interviews about their changes as instructors were solicited, inclusive of specific information relative to their use of curriculum maps,

integrated lesson plans, improved writing strategies, and best practice teaching practices. Teacher and administrator commentary, along with student achievement data, were carefully considered during the course of this study in an attempt to find patterns that can be used by other school districts to improve learning.

Most studies on the use of instructional coaching models in schools have focused on modifying teacher attitudes toward instructional change and acceptance of coaches as a change agent in the school. Recent investigations commissioned by The Annenberg Institute for School Reform and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation in 2003 embody detailed scrutiny of the practice of using instructional coaches as school based staff developers, with the stated function of improving teaching capacity (Aspen Institute Program on Education: Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2003; Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003). Few studies have been done on the influence of instructional coaches in relation to student achievement.

The design of this study is qualitative in nature and includes perusal of some objective information that can assist in interpretation of interview and observation data gathered. By looking at the numbers of teachers that are using curriculum maps, creating integrated lesson plans, decreasing failure rates, and improving test scores, the researcher can ascertain the level of participation of teachers in efforts made by instructional coaches to improve teaching practices in the school. Coupled with information gleaned during interviews conducted with teachers and administrators, this data lend support to the qualitative commentary gathered. Additionally, the focus of this study was from a

constructivist viewpoint as strategies touted by the instructional specialists are progressive in nature, whereas many studies of coaching have been in situations where the coaches were training teachers on direct instruction models.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research design employed in this study and to detail the specific methods and procedures used in conducting this qualitative case study of two schools within a school district that houses an instructional coaching program.

Rationale for Specific Design

The qualitative research design was described by Borg and Gall in 1989 as an investigative method to be used within educational settings when seeking deep understanding of a particular event. Effective qualitative research must be done in a natural setting, depends on interaction between the researcher and participants, and requires the researcher to consider emerging aspects as they arise while interpreting data gathered through many filters. Once the researcher acknowledges inherent biases and details the process of reasoning followed to reach conclusions, the reader of qualitative research conducted in the educational field can glean information from the work which can be of use in their own setting (Creswell, 2003).

In qualitative research, the investigator is attempting to understand what meaning participants in the study have given to a situation and record that information, thereby documenting the emic perspective. This is done via collection of data by the researcher from the participants, analysis of data in an ongoing format so that additional information

can be gathered as questions arise, and channeling a large amount of data into a thick, rich descriptive text that uses the unique perspectives of the participants and the observations of the researcher to establish the context of the study so the reader can perceive the picture in its entirety and with accuracy. This necessitates the gathering of a large amount of data, coding it for examination, looking carefully for ways to describe the phenomenon observed, and writing the story of the participants in such a way that the reader can clearly see the relevance to his own situation (Merriam, 1998). This study focused on developing a word picture that describes how instructional coaches function within the schools under investigation so the reader can understand the role of the coaches as well as the hindrances facing them in doing their job.

Case Study Rationale

Though there are a variety of ways to explore a question through qualitative research design, the case study is used to explore specific events or activities taking place within the educational setting, providing a comprehensive and detailed description for the reader. The case study format holds several advantages, which include providing the reader an opportunity to make judgments about the trustworthiness and transferability of the findings based on reading the thick description of the situation within a defined context. Additionally, the reader is given a glimpse into the actual setting and can view the interplay between participants, which can be useful information when determining the possibilities of replicating the situation within another setting. The case study approach

is often used to assist an organization with facilitating change and determine future directions needed (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993).

When placing case studies into distinct categories, Merriam (1998) established three types based on their content: descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative. In a descriptive case study, a detailed account is presented of the program or process under study. Interpretive case studies are generally descriptive but include analysis of the issue under study to the point of interpreting what is viewed and offering theories about what is meant within the study. Case studies that are evaluative in nature describe and explain the phenomenon while producing judgment about the issue under study.

This study followed the design of an evaluative case study, as it sought to describe the phenomenon of instructional coaching in a thick, richly descriptive manner so that the reader can understand it within context, explain the phenomenon through analysis of data gathered, and evaluate the usefulness of the program relative to its setting. This type of case study was selected as the findings could provide reasons for continuation or dissolution of the program under study. Perspectives of the participants are presented along with the observations of the researcher, who serves as the primary instrument for data collection in the field and as the person charged with using inductive reasoning strategies to analyze and interpret all information gathered in order to present findings that will assist readers in making a judgment relative to the efficacy of the program (Merriam, 1998). In general, the case study results were used for the purposes of recording actual events, providing the reader with an understanding of instructional

coaching within the context presented, and serving as a potential catalyst for change should the reader determine to chart a new direction for his organization based on information read (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, Allen, 1993).

The case study research approach carries limitations, as does any research methodology. Since the case study must cover the topic thoroughly in a thick, rich description, it often becomes so lengthy that educational decision makers do not take time to read it in its entirety. Additionally, in a case study, the researcher is the primary research tool for data collection and analysis. Consequently, the ethics of the researcher are a key factor in the solidity of the study. The researcher must spend sufficient time with each participant in order to delve deeply enough within the problem to find the real issues, must appropriate enough hours to adequately analyze data gathered, must be sensitive to the nuances within human relationships to determine when additional study is necessary to obtain a clear and accurate picture of the issue, and must establish proper checks and balances within the study to assure quality results (Merriam, 1998).

Data Collection Methods

Once sites and/or individuals are purposefully selected for investigation in a qualitative case study model, multiple methods are typically employed for data collection. The three most common techniques used are interview, observation and document analysis (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, Allen, 1993; Merriam, 1998).

In an interview, the researcher creates a situation in which a conversation with a purpose takes place. Questions asked depend on the type information sought within the

research study. The interview can be highly structured, semi-structured or unstructured, depending on the goals of the project and the relationship with the participants. In structured interviews, questions are precisely written and asked, while in semi-structured and unstructured interviews, the queries are more loosely stated so the participants can air their concerns and perceptions more freely. The pre-formed questions in a semi-structured interview are the basis of the conversation between researcher and participant but the researcher has the flexibility to let the interviewee address other issues not specifically covered. Unstructured interviews are more like a conversation as there are no predetermined questions. When collecting information via the observation method, the researcher (Merriam, 1998).

During observations, the researcher must be attentive to events, behaviors and artifacts within the setting observed while seeking to glimpse and understand the perceptions of reality held by the participants, what each participant is concerned about, and what behaviors they exhibit. Observations can be highly focused or unstructured, depending on the stage within the investigation and the role of the researcher. In most qualitative research, the researcher will choose to be a participant as observer or an observer as participant, depending on the level of engagement the researcher has with the participants. If the researcher is a participant as observer, his activities are known to the participant and he is considered a part of the situation. In the case of the researcher as observer-participant, the researcher is seen to be there primarily to gather information, though he is accepted as a participant at times (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen,

1993). In an observation, it is imperative to denote and record the setting, the participants, the activities or interactions, conversations, and subtle factors observed (Merriam, 1998).

Document analysis is another source for compiling evidence within a qualitative research design. Generally, any documents that are deemed relevant to the topic are perused by the investigator. This could include but is not limited to official documents of the organization, personal journals of participants, media published, meeting transcripts, audiotapes, videotapes, researcher-generated items, and public records (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

Rationale for Case Study in Exploring Instructional Coaching

The purpose of this case study was to describe, analyze and evaluate the influence of instructional coaches within two schools in one school district in Mississippi. The following three research questions established the boundaries for this case study:

1. What roles does the instructional coach play in the school setting?
2. How do roles served by the instructional coaches influence student performance and teacher practice?
3. What hindrances or problems are perceived by educators when encountering an instructional coach within a school?

The three research questions were designed to address the purpose of the study, which is to provide a holistic view of the function performed by the instructional coach within the educational setting. The first question directed the investigation toward

describing the many functions served by the instructional coach within a school setting, including those described within an official job description, tasks that arise out of situations as they occur, and responsibilities assigned by a supervising principal that are aimed at accomplishing everyday tasks within the school. Additionally, question one was posed within the research of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (2003) because researchers sought evidence that school-based professional developers assist schools with improvement issues.

The second guiding question was posed to determine how instructional coaches influence student performance. Improving academic achievement of students is of paramount importance to school administrators and teaching staff due to recently imposed accountability issues, but has historically been the professed mission of the educators. This question sought to describe those roles or tasks undertaken by the instructional coaches that may possibly influence student learning and teacher classroom practices. Addressing this question should assist readers in crafting job descriptions of instructional coaches to best fit the academic needs of students within their care.

Question three addressed the inherent problems within human relationships as they exist in a school setting, putting definition to teacher voiced hindrances and problems noted within the coaching process. In any social setting, including an educational institution, it is essential to identify and explore problems perceived by those present in the environment. By identifying the possible obstructions and barriers that individuals or groups may present, progress may be accomplished more efficiently.

Further, it may be possible to avert negative attitudes or reactions to the instructional coach or the initiatives undertaken by the position if steps are taken to recognize the potential encumbrances that could impede progress.

Context of Study

Within the third largest school district in Mississippi, it became evident to district level administrators at the end of the 2001-2002 school year that teachers were experiencing difficulty implementing instructional practices necessary to improve student performance. Although the school district had expended over one hundred thousand dollars that year for professional development training sessions on best practice techniques and materials to implement enhanced instructional strategies, it was apparent that teachers were not incorporating information learned at sessions attended into everyday classroom instructional practice. This observation was made by building level administrators, who reported that new methodology was not observed during evaluation sessions, nor were techniques integrated into lesson plans. Further, district administrators charged with improving curriculum and instruction within the district noted that best practices were not written into curriculum maps, materials purchased remained on the storage shelf often unwrapped or dust covered, test scores did not improve in targeted areas, and teachers appeared perplexed when asked direct questions about implementation of the strategies covered in the professional development sessions. Because of this observed disconnect between training and practice, school district officials instituted an instructional coaching program during the 2002-03 school year in

an effort to reduce resistance to modifying instructional practices and to increase confidence among teachers by providing follow-up contact at the local school level after training sessions.

District level administrators within the school district perused multiple factors in determining the four schools to house an instructional coach during school year 2002-2003. Since the district is divided into eight attendance zones with each housing a K-12 configuration of school buildings, district officials decided to place the instructional coaches in four different attendance zones, while simultaneously selecting the schools with the lowest overall test scores. The four sites chosen had the greatest need for instructional assistance and, therefore, the most potential for academic growth of students. Additionally, each school selected held an accreditation rating of three, denoting adequate performance per the Mississippi Department of Education; however, the schools were judged to be at the lower end of the continuum for level three schools, indicating the schools were at risk of obtaining even lower scores if no action were taken. School One (grades K-12), School Two (grades 3-8), School Three (grades K-12), and School Four (grades 4-8) were selected to house an instructional coach because they ranked among the district's lowest performing schools in the areas of reading, language arts and mathematics on the Mississippi Curriculum Test in grades two through eight when analyzing the spring, 2002 test data. One instructional coach was appointed to each of these four schools for the 2002-2003 school year. These four coaches were

instructed to assist teachers in grades within the configuration of their assigned school site, as noted above.

At the end of the 2002-2003 school year, principals at the schools housing an instructional coach made preliminary statements that having this source of professional assistance so readily available for teacher and administrator consultation on issues relative to instruction was the main contributing factor in improved test scores experienced after only one year of program implementation. Principals in the school zones not served by an instructional coach made requests that one be placed in their area to equalize benefits across the district since all schools face the same testing requirements for accreditation. Hence, the coaching program was expanded into four additional school zones so that one instructional coach served each of the eight attendance zones in the district during school years 2003-04 and 2004-05.

Although information was gathered from all eight attendance zones by the school district in their routine evaluation of the coaching program, this study was limited to two kindergarten through twelfth grade attendance zones, School One and School Two, as these are the only two locations where the same instructional coaches have been working with teachers since the inception of the program in the fall of 2002, thereby providing a continuity in services that has led to an element of trust between the school faculty and the coach.

At the direction of district personnel, each of the eight instructional coaches set goals and developed an action plan for impacting specific areas. To positively address

student performance, each instructional coach devised a plan for decreasing the failure rate within the school and for improving writing scores of fourth and seventh graders. Additionally, instructional coaches developed a systematic process for assuring that teachers develop two tangible and useful documents that will assist teachers in implementing best practice strategies within the classroom. Those documents included written curriculum maps that cross multiple grade levels and integrated lesson plans in third through fifth grades.

The school district evaluates the efficacy of the instructional coaching program based on the extent to which the goals set are accomplished plus teacher and administrator assessment of the worth of activities undertaken by instructional coaches. This judgment of worth of the program is a primary concern of the school district as it must justify continuation of the expenditure of federal and local dollars for salaries and administrative support for instructional coaches. Though this study examined many of the same documents that are inspected by the district in their decision making process, this study sought greater depth of understanding of the human dynamics evident within an educational setting in which instructional coaching is encouraged.

Setting

This study was conducted in two schools within the third largest school district in Mississippi. Each school is located within a zone that houses kindergarten through twelfth grade students. The schools were chosen because they are the only two locations within the district where the same principals and instructional coaches have been working

with teachers since the inception of the program in the fall of 2002, thereby providing a continuity in services that has led to an element of trust between the school faculty and the coach. Additionally, the researcher is a district employee and the coordinator of the instructional coaching program, giving ease of access for the observation, interview, and document analysis phases of investigation.

School One is located in a rural area twenty miles from a metropolitan area with chicken farming and low-paying jobs related to the poultry industry employing many of the parents. Less than twenty-five percent of graduates of this school attend post-secondary training opportunities, choosing instead to seek employment in the local area as their parents did before them. This school is divided into two buildings located on the same campus with one school housing kindergarten through sixth grades and the other school comprising grades seven through twelve. Each has its own principal but the schools share parking and cafeteria facilities. There is a distance learning laboratory available in the school for courses not offered within the local curriculum but only three or four students a year opt to access this opportunity and no students choose to enroll in dual enrollment courses offered at the area community college or in on-line advanced placement or other courses available through the Mississippi On-Line Learning Institute. Over sixty percent of the student population qualifies for the free or reduced lunch program. The school consists of primarily Caucasian students but has an African-American minority population that is approximately thirty percent of the student body

and the Hispanic population, currently comprising under ten percent of the population, is growing at a rate of about ten to fifteen students per year across all grade levels.

School Two is located in a suburban area near two major interstate highways less than five miles from a metropolitan area. There are a number of manufacturing industries within the community, yet much of the housing is trailer parks and low to low-middle class homes. Over half of the graduates of this school attend post-secondary training opportunities, yet the graduating group is less than half the size of the group that entered in ninth grade denoting a large dropout rate. This school zone is divided into three buildings. The kindergarten through second grade building is located a half mile from the other two campuses and is off the highway. The upper elementary, comprising grades three through six, is located beside the high school building, which houses grades seven through twelve. Each building has its own principal and assistant principal and operates as a separate entity. About three high school students per year enroll in dual enrollment courses offered at the area community college, none access the on-line advanced placement or other courses available through the Mississippi On-Line Learning Institute, and a significant number enroll in vocational courses and the Reserve Officer Training Corps on campus. Over fifty percent of the student population qualifies for the free or reduced lunch program. The school consists of primarily Caucasian students but has an African-American minority population that is approximately thirty percent of the student body and a growing Hispanic population, currently comprising almost ten percent of the population.

Participants

Purposive sampling was utilized within this study for selection of participants as the researcher sought to select individuals that could provide the greatest insight into the questions posed by this study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993; Merriam, 1998). Participants at the two school areas under study were the principal, the instructional coach, and one teacher per grade. This necessitated a total of thirteen interview sessions, with the five lead administrators and two instructional coaches being interviewed in one-on-one settings to comprise seven of the interviews. The instructional coaches are both white females; three principals were white male, while one female principals was white and the other was black. Teachers were interviewed in three groups of five or less at both schools in grade groupings as follows: kindergarten through fourth grade, fifth through eighth grade, and ninth through twelfth grade. This made a total of six interview sessions with separate teacher groups. The teacher participants at were primarily female (eleven out of thirteen at school one and ten out of thirteen at school two) and white (ten out of thirteen at school one and twelve out of thirteen at school two), as reflects the teaching population at each school. All were grade or department chairpersons as they have regular meetings with other faculty members and, therefore, have enhanced insight into the concerns of the school based on their discussions with peers.

All teacher participants had at least five years teaching experience and range in age from 28 to 60. Each administrative participant had at least a master's degree, with

one having earned a specialist and one a doctorate. One of the instructional coaches has a doctorate and is a National Board Certified Teacher. The other has a master's degree and several years teaching experience in another state, where she was privy to outstanding training from several nationally recognized educators.

Theoretical Framework for Data Collection and Interpretation

Recent research by Fullan (1993), Killion (2002) and Robb (2000) regarding use of instructional coaches as a school improvement tool have indicated that the goal is to establish a professional learning community within the school in which teachers learn by watching effective models, reflecting collaboratively on teaching practices, practicing and getting feedback on new strategies learned, and by focusing on continuously improving student work assignments. Instructional coaches are effective as leaders in these types of isolation breaking activities when they are well versed in adult learning theory (Bowman & McCormick, 2002; Sparks, 2002). This theoretical perspective is reflected in the data collection and interpretation phases of the study since the district under study has spent professional development dollars in the sum of five thousand dollars to train the instructional coaches on adult learning theory and strategies for dealing collaboratively with teachers to accomplish improved instructional practices.

Further, the district has expended funds to train the instructional coaches in best practice teaching strategies that are part of the district initiatives, specifically methods for shared and guided reading, process writing, organizing in a nonlinguistic format, differentiating instruction, development of integrated lesson plans and curriculum maps,

and assessing student work samples. The researcher was attuned to hearing from teachers and administrators if these best practice strategies have been assimilated into the culture of the school and if teachers and administrators perceive the instructional coach as helpful in stimulating this change process. Further, the researcher listened for comments from participants that reflect the use of adult learning theory in delivery of ideas or concepts for change. Coaching logs were analyzed to ascertain the degree and type of direct assistance that coaches have given classroom teachers through demonstration lessons, assistance with writing integrated units and curriculum maps, observation and feedback sessions, and work on developing proper student assessment tools.

Methods Employed

The purpose of this case study was to describe the instructional coaching program in two attendance zones within one school district while analyzing the efficacy of the instructional coaching phenomena. To accomplish this task, data was gathered, analyzed and interpreted in an iterative fashion and recorded in a narrative format to amply discuss recurrent themes, comparisons between cases under study and give the reader an adequate picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Data was gathered through interview, observation and document analysis.

Interview

In this study, the researcher interviewed the principals and instructional coach in one-on-one settings and at least one teacher per grade in small groups of no more than

five in the two schools under study. This necessitated a total of thirteen interview sessions, with the five administrators and two instructional coaches being interviewed separately by the researcher. Teachers were interviewed in three groups of five or less at both schools. Interviews lasted between thirty and ninety minutes, with instructional coach and administrator interviews being the longest sessions. All interviews were conducted on the school campus with teachers interviewed in a vacant teacher room, discussions with principals held in their office, and instructional coach interviews audio-taped in their respective offices.

The interviews were semi-structured and unstructured so that participants could voice their thoughts and understandings in an authentic manner. In the semi-structured interview segment, the researcher began questioning using a set of questions that correlate with the guiding questions within this study but these questions were flexibly worded to allow the participant to answer freely but within general parameters. The interviewer also allowed the conversation to flow into other areas as topics or issues arose during the free flowing discussion, providing the unstructured portion of the interviews. This method allowed the researcher to accomplish the purposes of the research study while providing opportunity of gaining insights presented spontaneously by participants, thereby affecting the direction of questioning and exploration within the study. The researcher took copious notes during the interview process using an interview protocol that includes key questions asked, probes used, transitions noted within interview, and interviewer comments and reflections. Additionally, sessions were audio taped so that

the interviews could be transcribed verbatim at a later date, then coded systematically to analyze and chunk the data gathered. This allowed iterative thinking whereby data was collected and analyzed simultaneously, lending to changes in data collection as new or unexpected information arose (Creswell, 2003).

Questions posed to teachers were specific to their relationship with the instructional coach and were as follows:

1. Have you sought the services of the instructional coach for help with curriculum mapping in your school? If yes, specify how she helped.
2. Have you sought the services of the instructional coach for help with creating integrated lesson plans? If yes, specify how she helped.
3. Have you sought the services of the instructional coach for help with raising writing skills of your students? If yes, specify how she helped.
4. Have you sought the services of the instructional coach for help with decreasing the failure rate of your classrooms? If yes, specify how she helped.
5. Have you sought the services of the instructional coach for help with implementing district initiatives in your classroom? If yes, specify how she helped. (Initiatives include: science kits, Algebra as Child's Play, teaching on the block, inquiry based science instruction, increase in experimentation in science, increased use of calculators, senior project, learning strategies course, improving writing skills across the curriculum,

curriculum mapping, integrated lesson plan use, balanced literacy, use of manipulatives in mathematics and social studies)

6. Discuss how the instructional coach assists with increasing academic achievement of students.
7. Describe the roles served by the instructional coaches that have the most impact on student achievement.
8. List concerns or problems you perceive as a teacher when encountering an instructional coach within the school.

Questions in the interview protocol for administrators and instructional coaches are verbatim as those posed above except the questions for administrators address their perceived role of the coach on improving the school, while the questions asked of instructional coaches ask for their perception of what differences they have made in the school. (See Interview Protocols: Appendix F, G and H)

Observation

Observational data was collected within this study by the researcher through multiple visits to the schools under investigation, prior to and including formal interview dates. Participants became familiar and comfortable with the researcher being present. Since the researcher in this study is a ‘participant as observer’ due to the job assignment with the school district as the supervisor of the instructional coaching program, participants in the study know the researcher had a vested interest in ascertaining the effectiveness of the program under study, had a part in the quest to make sense out of the

experience they have encountered, and had a direct interest in their individual role in the experience (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, Allen, 1993). The researcher remained attuned to the setting, the participants, the planned and unplanned activities/interactions, subtle factors, and nonverbal communication clues as the study progressed (Merriam, 1998).

Observational data was collected via a consistent protocol utilizing a single sheet to record demographic data (time, place, date) along with descriptive notes regarding the observation and reflective notes relative to the problems, ideas, and thoughts of the observer. The observational protocol was a single sheet of paper divided down the middle with one side for descriptive notes regarding the setting observed and the other side reserved for reflective notes relative to the problems, ideas, and thoughts of the observer. Demographic information relative to the time, place and date was also recorded (Creswell, 2003).

The interactions observed between the instructional coaches and the principals have many commonalities across school and grade levels. Principals relied on the instructional coach to assist with interpretation of test scores received and to develop a plan of action for addressing problems noted. Though the principals fulfilled their role of communicating the plan to the faculty at large, it was expected that the coach would implement the plan as set forth. Principals at each school assigned the instructional coach to work with a particular teacher that was experiencing difficulty with classroom control or communication of content to students. It was clear that all professionals involved (principal, coach and teacher) were aware that the coach does not evaluate the

teacher but offers assistance and suggestions for improvement of instruction. No animosity or uneasiness was noted as a result of the clear delineation in roles. Principals in each school under study had a regular system for obtaining information from the instructional coach. Two of the five principals had a regular meeting time established with the coach for discussing district and school issues and to plan faculty meetings. The other three principals communicated more through e-mail and phone conversations about the same concerns. The instructional coaches were comfortable with offering suggestions and opinions to all principals and made an effort to have face to face contact with the principals at least once a week to update them on progress of teachers and students.

The interactions between instructional coaches and teachers were varied. For some teachers, the coach was used as a person to obtain resources, as evidenced by their asking the coach to obtain certain materials or ideas for instruction. In this vein, the instructional coach provided copies of curriculum, assisted with preparing materials for science experiments, helped teachers pick out appropriate books from the book rooms for individual and groups of students, and arranged field trips for classes. The instructional coaches had purchased materials for, organized and stocked school science labs and book rooms for teachers to access. Many comments were heard from teachers about the fact that using these two resources had simplified their task of planning appropriate lessons as items were more accessible. The instructional coaches were also viewed by teachers as a confidante or readily available expert. This was evidenced by listening to teachers set appointments for future classroom observations or demonstration lessons, watching

teachers interact with the coach at grade level and faculty meetings, and hearing teachers ask for advice on specific issues or problems and receive the response willingly. At one school, the instructional coach was the leader of a regular weekly meeting with every teacher during their forty-five minute planning time, at which a lengthy discussion was held over one recent assignment given by one teacher. Teachers were engaged in a deep discussion of how the lesson assigned met the standards as written within the curriculum framework, how the assignment was requiring students to perform at grade level, and what revisions needed to be made to the written task to improve it the next time it is assigned. The instructional coach was viewed by the teacher group as the expert to consult when the discussion got bogged down.

Instructional coaches were observed in other type tasks as well. They set and attended appointments with individual teachers upon request by the teacher or principal, attended training sessions with teachers and later discussed application of the learning within the local school setting, verbally encouraged teachers that were having a difficult day, and spoke with teachers that were needing immediate assistance with improving a lesson.

Generally, the coach was observed in multi-tasking behaviors and could rarely be found in her office. Both coaches had developed a system for showing teachers where they could be found if needed by posting their daily time schedule with location on a marker board right outside their office. Hence, a teacher frequently came to find the instructional coach within the building during her planning time if they had an immediate

problem or just a quick question. Teachers did not interrupt the instructional coach during demonstration lessons during any observation conducted as a part of this study. Previously, both coaches had made it clear to teachers that teaching time is valuable and should be respected by professionals.

Document Collection

Qualitative data, as described above relative to interviews and observations, were collected along with a multitude of physical documents from the two attendance zones included within this study. The qualitative documents collected at School One and School Two includes coaching logs and self-administered structured and semi-structured interview data from the past (2003-2004 and 2004-2005) plus coaching logs and face to face semi-structured and open-ended group interview data during the current school year (2005-2006), which is the fourth year of program implementation.

Other documents collected for review were curriculum maps, integrated lesson plans, failure rates, past structured interview/survey data, current year semi-structured compilations, unstructured interview transcriptions as coded for interpretation, teacher evaluation data, coaching journals, accreditation rating information, writing scores for grades four and seven, videotape of teachers attempting new strategies, e-mails of participants, the researcher's journal, and Mississippi Curriculum Test scores. Interview and observation data were also gathered during school year 2005-2006.

Documents gathered from the two schools areas under study were perused to find patterns and to reflect on the perspectives based in theory. Continually, the researcher

looked at data collected to ascertain whether or not the data collected was of sufficient depth and credibility to warrant inclusion, reformulating strategies as the need became apparent. Coded information was analyzed for themes then meshed into a coherent narrative and represented in graphic or tabular form to convey the findings to the reader. In the final interpretation of data findings, the researcher described findings in such detail that the reader can make sense of the conclusions and ascertain relevance for his own educational challenges.

Document Analysis

In the document analysis portion of this case study, the researcher identified fifty-one themes or recurring patterns in data collected initially, though these were narrowed down into like categories. To accomplish this task, information gathered through interview was transcribed then sorted according to theme using a coding system prior to reading to establish a general impression and to ascertain whether or not the data collected was of sufficient depth and credibility to warrant inclusion. Data was analyzed iteratively, though a general reading was done prior to the final analysis phase to ascertain general impressions and determine if there is a need to modify the coding system. Data was coded so that themes that have arisen could be identified and meshed into a coherent narrative to convey the findings to the reader. Themes were identified in the thick, rich narrative description of the cases under study. Where appropriate, graphs and tables were utilized to communicate the findings. The final interpretation of the data attempts to describe findings and detail what has been learned in such a fashion that the

reader can make sense of the data while drawing conclusions about its use relative to their own unique setting.

In considering the roles served by the instructional coaches, the themes that emerged included: being a catalyst for change, serving as a supporter for teachers through mentoring and other actions, assisting teachers as a specialist in pedagogy and content, providing resources, facilitating adult learning by providing appropriate professional development opportunities, assisting with making data driven decisions, serving as a liaison between the administration and faculty members, and acting as the quality control agent within the building.

When the role of the instructional coach intersects with influencing teacher practice, themes that arise include the necessity of the coach spearheading district instructional initiatives (planning), providing feedback to teachers on progress in changing teaching practices (communication), provision of on-site professional training that matches teacher needs (training), and provision of appropriate resources (materials/resources). All this influences student performance on statewide tests, classroom assessments, failure rates, and writing skills (assessment), which is directly related to accreditation level (accountability).

Four overriding themes were prevalent when considering the hindrances or problems perceived by educators when encountering an instructional coach within the school setting. Those issues repeated by most interviewees included the fact that the coach must be separated from the evaluation process (evaluation), the teachers and

coaches must be given time to interact professionally (time), the school administration must support the decisions of the coach when challenged (administrative support), and expectations must be set high by all involved and are actually raised by the presence of a coach (expectations).

A multitude of documents were reviewed, inclusive of: curriculum maps developed for all grades, integrated lesson plans compiled and implemented for grades three through five by teachers in collaboration with coaches, failure rate compilations for grades three through seven, past structured interview/survey data, current year semi-structured compilations, unstructured interview transcriptions as coded for interpretation, teacher evaluation data, coaching logs/journals, accreditation rating information for school years 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005, writing scores for grades four and seven, videotape of teachers attempting new strategies, e-mails of participants, the researcher's journal, and Mississippi Curriculum Test scores for grades two through seven from school year 2001-2002 as a baseline, 2002-2003 as the first year of program implementation, 2003-2004 as the second year of implementation, and school year 2004-2005 which is the third year the program was in place. Interview and observation data from school year 2005-2006 was also included in the analysis process.

Data Analysis

It is imperative that data be analyzed systematically so that results of the research can be found and reported in a useful manner. In a qualitative study, analysis is ongoing yet fits into five steps including organization of data, generation of categories or themes,

testing the emergent themes against the data, searching for alternative explanations to the data, and writing the report (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

As is appropriate in step one of the analysis process, interview data was transcribed from the audiotapes to a word document within three days of the encounter and the given to the participant to review so memory of the event was relatively fresh. The draft transcription was double spaced to give the participant ample room for revision. Necessary changes in the transcript were made immediately by the researcher. Then, all information was divided or organized into three stacks: teachers, administrators and coaches. These collections were read repeatedly by the researcher to gain sufficient grasp of the content.

The data was then coded by category as themes emerged, with each theme first marked with a different color within the text and the theme denoted in the left margin. This is termed as emergent category designation by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) and yielded fifty-one distinct themes. Like categories or themes were combined or grouped, as is suggested by Merriam (1998) into a more manageable number. Transcript data from each participant was similarly categorized, with meaningful phrases, sentences or entire responses chunked or grouped according to the answers to specific interview questions. The category was denoted in the left margin and other comments or relationships were annotated in the right margin.

Next in the analysis process was the evaluation of the data collected in relationship to the purpose of the study and the specific questions posed. Each category

was related back to one of the research questions posed within this study. In question one, themes that were recurrent regarding the roles served by the instructional coaches were narrowed to the following:

- catalyst for change
- supporter for teachers through mentoring and other actions
- specialist in pedagogy and content
- provider of resources
- facilitator of adult learning by provision of a variety of professional training opportunities at the local school site
- data driven decision maker
- liaison between the administration and faculty members
- quality control agent within the building.

Within research question two, which involves how the coach influences teacher practice, themes that arose included:

- planning
- communication
- training
- materials/ resources
- assessment
- accountability.

Four overriding themes that prevailed when considering the hindrances or problems perceived by educators when encountering an instructional coach within the school setting were:

- evaluation
- time
- administrative support
- expectations.

Discrepancies noted were addressed by a return to the original sources for clarification. This practice ensured an accurate reflection of the responses of the participants. Once this was accomplished, it was necessary to search for other explanations for data gathered so that personal biases of the researcher could be eliminated and alternate explanations for findings could be explored. Findings were then written to reflect the viewpoints of the teachers, administrators and coaches involved in the study.

Pragmatics of the Study

Longitudinal data from 2001 through 2005 was collected from one school district and analysis of that information was accomplished simultaneously with collection in order to properly classify data and note patterns as research progresses. The participants sample in the study was purposive and convenient, with the instructional coaches and lead principals from School One and School Two interviewed during the 2005-2006 school year via face to face, semi-structured and open-ended interview procedures. Self-

administered structured interview data that exists within the district from these same two groups plus teachers from grades three through seven were reviewed from school year 2003-2004 and 2004-2005.

Both instructional coaches included within this study are female, white and have a minimum of twenty years teaching experience prior to becoming an instructional coach. The setting of the study is purposeful as it includes each physical building served by an instructional specialist during the years covered by this study. The principals to be interviewed have been in place since the inception of the program in their schools.

Approval of the Superintendent of Education for the school district was obtained prior to beginning compilation of any research, as was approval by the Institutional Research Board at Mississippi State University.

Issues of Rigor

By gaining a picture of the instructional coaching program from this multiplicity of arenas – interview, observation, and documents – the researcher can insure the credibility of the study through triangulation, which involves examining evidence from different data sources to provide a coherent representation of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). The case study approach covering more than one site will add to the consistency, trustworthiness and transferability of the study. Data was collected and analyzed in a sequential transformative format so that the theoretical perspective was considered throughout the process.

To give strength to this case study, multiple documents were analyzed in order to explore the instructional coaching program in depth in two school attendance zones within one Mississippi school district and ascertain effectiveness. Qualitative data was collected at the two attendance zones in the form of coaching logs and structured and semi-structured interview data from the past (2003-2004 and 2004-2005) plus face to face, semi-structured, and open-ended group and one-on-one interview data collected during the current school year (2005-2006), which is the fourth year of program implementation with the same instructional coaches present in their assigned schools.

Cases were studied across these two attendance zones to find patterns and to reflect on the perspectives based in theory. As there are three school buildings within the School Two attendance zone, housing K-2, 3-6 and 7-12, and two school buildings within the School One attendance zone, housing K-6 and 7-12, this study encompasses a case study approach at each site, which should add to the external validity and generalizability of the study for readers (Merriam, 1998). Data was also gathered via consideration of accreditation ratings, numbers of curriculum maps developed for grades three through seven, number of interdisciplinary units developed for grades three through five, failure rate data for grades three through seven, writing scores for grades four and seven, and Mississippi Curriculum Test data for grades three through seven from school year 2001-2002 as a baseline, 2002-2003 as the first year of program implementation, 2003-2004 as the second year of implementation, and 2004-2005 as the third year of implementation. This data was analyzed in conjunction with qualitative data gathered to identify patterns

and solidify perspectives noted (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Additionally, the collection and analysis of the quantitative data in conjunction with the qualitative elements strengthens the study by adding a component that has been absent in previous studies of the influence of instructional coaches on student performance.

Credibility

Credibility of the study was insured by the researcher as the following were provided: detailed account of the focus of the study, researcher's role, informant's role, basis for selection for data gathered, triangulation, and multiple methods of data collection and analysis. Marshall and Rossman (1999) indicate that a study is credible if it accurately describes the subject under study. Further, credibility is a function of demonstrating persistence in observation, triangulation of sources and methods, extensive member checks and adequate engagement of the researcher with the subjects or situation (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). In this investigation, triangulation and multiple methods of data collection and analysis were used, as were member checks. Further, data gathered within the study covers a prolonged period of time (2001-2005), making it possible to find patterns of consistency within the program. Prolonged engagement of the program over a five year period assists in establishing truth value or credibility of a study as rapport was established and the researcher gained a true feeling for the culture of the organization within which the study was conducted.

Triangulation

Between-method triangulation is used in this study as the three sources of data were observation, interview and document analysis. This strategy is stronger than triangulating within one method, such as gathering three separate observations. Data in this study was corroborated as much as possible through the use of interview, observation and document analysis on like issues, accomplishing triangulation. Internal validity was assured through the use of these multiple checks (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993).

Member Checks

Member checking was used with all interviews conducted in school year 2005-2006 to insure that the researcher accurately reflected the thoughts of those interviewed and to create an ongoing dialogue. The member check strategy gives the participant an opportunity to review the findings of the researcher and verify or dispute the perspectives portrayed (Merriam, 1998). The researcher in this study continually checked to insure proper interpretation of information shared by participants during the interview process by providing a written transcription of the interview for review and revision. Participants were asked by the researcher to clarify any points they felt were not addressed properly or adequately.

Dependability

It is imperative to any reader of a research study to be able to ascertain the dependability of the material read. Merriam (1998) suggests that consistency or dependability of a study can be obtained by triangulation, audit trail, and discussing the investigator's subjectivity. The issue of triangulation was addressed in an earlier section within this study and indicated that issues consistently found in document, observation and interview data were scrutinized in depth to ascertain patterns and evident truths. The subjectivity of the investigator and audit trail are covered in sections below.

Audit Trail

An audit trail documents what a researcher did when conducting a study and leads to trustworthiness of the study as findings can be confirmed (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). In this study, the audit trail was established through a rich description of the data collected, interpreted and analyzed so that readers can determine precisely what was done during the study and note how decisions were made about each portion of the study, from collection to analysis and interpretation.

Subjectivity

Since the researcher in a qualitative case study is the primary research instrument, it is important that the subjectivity of the investigator, or researcher bias, be clarified. Since the researcher in this study does have a personal connection with the study and a vested interest in its success as the supervisor of the instructional coaching program within the school district under investigation, all readers seeking to replicate the results

should make certain that any coaching program undertaken in their district supply the same support system if success is to be anticipated. The instructional coaches in this school district meet weekly for two hours to discuss local school progress toward meeting district initiatives and to be trained on effective coaching techniques. This element of training and contact is judged essential to the success of instructional coaching programs (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003). The researcher sought to retain objectivity during the study by maintaining an attitude open to all input that was relevant to the study.

Transferability

The reader of any research document, generally, is seeking information on an issue for which he can gain knowledge and perhaps transfer an idea to his own setting to make improvements. It is the responsibility of the reader of a research document to determine the transferability of the findings to the context of his own situation (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). A thick, rich description of findings assists the reader with this task and, along with triangulation, works toward assuring transferability (Merriam, 1998). As part of this study, the researcher had a peer from within the school district and an external auditor examine all data collected and interpretations made prior to finalizing the thick, rich description of research gathered. This assures that the reader of the final document can make transfer of ideas from a solid comparison base.

Thick, Rich Description

A thick, rich text describing all aspects of the study is a vital part of qualitative research design. By discussing the situation under study in great detail, the researcher creates the possibility that the reader can make appropriate and adequate connections to own his situation and, thereby, make decisions that benefit another setting that is outside the parameters of the original research.

Ethics

Research within this study was conducted in an ethical manner. Before any data was collected, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Mississippi State University. Additionally, permission was obtained from the superintendent of the school district and principals at each school site before any participants were interviewed or observed or any documents gathered. Participants were required to sign a consent form that detailed the purpose of the study. A numerical pseudonym was assigned to each participant to insure anonymity and confidentiality of each participant.

Summary

This study employs a qualitative research design through the evaluative case study approach, utilizing semi-structured and unstructured interviews, observation, and document analysis as primary investigative tools. Triangulation, accomplished via examination of these multiple data sources, provides credibility for the study, while member checks, audit trail, peer editing, and addressing the subjectivity of the researcher

further solidify the dependability of the findings for the reader. Through creation of a thick, rich description of the research findings, proper analysis of data gathered, and careful notation of patterns found within the study, the researcher offers a productive evaluation of the two instructional coaching programs. Readers of the findings can then make generalizations to their particular setting to determine the possibilities within replication of the efforts documented.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The focal point of most studies on the use of instructional coaching models in public schools in the United States have focused on modifying teacher attitudes toward instructional change and acceptance of coaches as a change agent in the school. This study focused on how instructional coaching yielded improved student achievement and modification of teaching strategy and instructional practices at two schools housing an instructional coach over a three year period. Teacher and administrator interviews and observations, along with student achievement data, were analyzed during the course of this study in an attempt to ascertain strategies that could possibly be used by other school districts to improve learning.

This chapter will detail the findings that emerged within the study which were based on the following research questions:

1. What roles does the instructional coach play in the school setting?
2. How do roles served by the instructional coaches influence student performance and teacher practice?
3. What hindrances or problems are perceived by educators when encountering an instructional coach within a school?

Hence, this chapter will attempt to clarify the influence of coaches on student performance and teacher effectiveness, to establish what roles are served by the instructional coaches, and to discuss problems or hindrances perceived by educators when encountering an instructional coach within the school setting.

**Question #1: What roles does the instructional coach play
in the school setting?**

For any employee to be effective, the job expectations must be defined. This is particularly true of instructional coaches within school settings since this is a relatively new position in most schools and job functions differ dramatically from school to school. Teachers, administrators and coaches should be apprised of the expectations within the position so full use of the professional assets of the coach will be recognized and so the effectiveness of the coach can be measured. Generally, the roles of the school based coach include being a catalyst for change, serving as a supporter for teachers, assisting teachers in the capacity as an instructional and curriculum specialist, providing resources and mentoring teachers, facilitating learning of the adults in the school setting through multiple types of professional development opportunities, and assisting with making data driven decisions (Killion & Harrison, 2005). Throughout this study, these roles were described by administrators and teachers in surveys collected and interviews conducted as those performed by their coach. The principal at school one stated:

For the first time in my years as a school administrator, I have a professional in my building that I can ask to assist teachers with specific

instructional tasks. Though I would like to do it myself, I am often distracted by other priorities that come up each day. It is wonderful to know that the coach is constantly working with teachers to help them improve instruction and our test scores. Our school coach works with teachers to develop a plan and then makes certain we all stay focused on getting to the goal.

Further, coaches independently list these activities as their consistent functions on the job. One coach summed up her job responsibilities as follows:

It is hard to describe what I do because every day is different, and actually every year is different. It is my task to work with data to determine what needs are evident and devise a plan of action, along with teachers and administrators, to improve student achievement. The first and hardest task is to convince teachers that change is necessary and to develop a systematic strategy for pulling all the educators along toward making the modifications in their everyday routine so students are engaged and learning to an improved degree. I may start out just getting the teachers resources and helping them with classroom management techniques. But once I have their trust, great things can happen!

There is great responsibility inherent in the task of being a catalyst for change. The coaches in this study quickly discovered that they must step forward with conviction on issues they have designated as priorities for change within the school. Taking the

initiative to formulate ideas, convince administrators of the efficacy of the plan, coach teachers through implementation and refinement of the idea, and assessing its effectiveness were important tasks performed by the coaches, as demonstrated in the comment by one coach:

teachers are often dragged kicking and screaming into trying a new idea but as long as the principal stands behind me, I know that most of them will give the idea a good faith effort and when they see results, they will proudly adopt it as their own methodology and my mission is accomplished.

These coaches eventually became the recognized advocate for the teachers. One teacher noted:

She met with me after school on a Friday for nearly an hour when I was so uptight about a problem I was encountering. She never told me what to do but helped me think it through and reach my own conclusions. Writing down the plan helped me to enter the next week with confidence that I would accomplish the goals set...and I did. I have seen her quietly work with others too. It's great to know there is someone to turn to that has the time and inclination to help.

It is impossible for one person to be an expert in all curricular and instructional issues, though this is often what is expected of a coach. Instead, the coach must be adept

at seeking out information upon request and not be afraid to ask questions and seek advice. One coach succinctly stated her position on this issue when she stated:

I don't pretend to have all the answers when teachers come to me for advice. It is important to know how to lead the teacher to find her own way to resolving her problem.

An instructional coach within a school setting serves as a mentor to teachers from the novice to experienced level, making it imperative that the coach be highly skilled in relationship development as well as content and pedagogy. Additionally, the coach must be a master at providing teachers with needed resources as this is the most direct way that teachers will perceive that the coach is being helpful to them. One middle school teacher said of her coach:

She helps me anytime I ask. She taught me how to use algebra tiles, helped me acquire an algebra DVD teaching program that the students love, made sure I got new graphing calculators, and showed me a new way to teach factoring. I have been teaching math for twenty years and have not gotten that much targeted assistance from any person in the school. I watch what she does to help beginning and new teachers in our building and I tell them how lucky they are to have the coach around to help them. When I started out, teachers just struggled and did the best they could. No one was around to discuss curriculum or teaching strategies with you.

Teachers learn best from one another and when the training is at the moment they need it, according to the instructional coaches within this study. Both coaches indicated that their role as facilitator of teacher learning was central to changes made in instructional practice within the school. After the coach shapes dialogue within the school around instructional needs, it is necessary to assess needs of each teacher and design learning around those identified needs while differentiating to meet diverse levels. Follow-up training is imperative to solidify learning and to communicate successes and weaknesses noted. One coach summed up her professional development responsibilities as follows:

Meeting the needs of each faculty member is a great challenge, especially when one is determined to make certain that the training is high quality.

But teachers appreciate the effort and they especially like having training in short bites during their plan time or briefly just after school. They ask questions pertinent to their day and make progress faster.

Another of the key roles served by the coaches in the schools under study was assisting teachers and administrators in making data driven decisions that affect student performance. At the beginning of each school year, school personnel scrutinize test scores from the previous year to ascertain areas of the curriculum and instructional process that warrant attention. The instructional coaches in both school zones were asked by administrators to work closely with teachers in their quest for looking for ways to improve student achievement. One administrator observed:

The strategies suggested by the coach for school improvement were all incorporated into our school strategic plan for improvement. They were specific and directly related to problems noted within the test scores.

Having the coach available to help teachers see the problem areas and work collaboratively to pinpoint a plan is invaluable as the coach can spend time with teachers in a non-threatening setting, whereas teachers are intimidated when the principal asks the same hard questions. More progress is made by having this intermediary that is so well informed about curriculum and instruction plus had intimate knowledge about the teachers and their strengths and weaknesses.

Undoubtedly, the instructional coach serves many important roles in the school setting which merge to create a mechanism through which positive change can happen. The coach assists teachers with developing professional skills by providing the resources needed to make the adjustments a reality within the classroom. Additionally, the coach provides the instructive feedback that can only be legitimately given by a fellow educator who has tried the strategy before and can assist with modifications to fit the classroom in question. As a mentor, the coach works side by side with teachers to ask the tough questions that assist in reaching data driven decisions, thereby impacting student learning positively.

Question #2: How do roles served by the instructional coach influence student performance and teacher practice?

This question addresses the multi-faceted roles served by the instructional coach that influence student performance and teacher practice. To adequately address this question, it has been broken into two parts. The first part addresses the influence of coaching on student performance, while the second part addresses change in teacher practice as a result of the opportunity for instructional coaching within the school.

Part A: Determining Influence of Coaches on Student Performance

Improved student achievement is the ultimate goal of any instructional coaching program, especially in the climate of accountability in educational institutions during following the enactment of the No Child Left Behind legislation nationally. Consequently, the instructional coaches in the schools under study were asked to assist teachers and administrators in making data driven decisions that affect student performance. At the beginning of each school year, school personnel scrutinize test scores from the previous year in order to ascertain areas of the curriculum and instructional process that warrant attention. The instructional coaches at both school zones were asked by administrators to work closely with teachers in this quest by looking at the components that make up the accreditation rating level of each school, Mississippi Curriculum Test scores, state administered writing test scores, and individual teacher and overall grade level failure rates. These indicators were considered during this study in

ascertaining whether or not the roles served by the instructional coaches within the school had an observable influence on student achievement or academic growth.

When the state of Mississippi began awarding accreditation levels to individual schools in 2002, the elementary school in school zone one in this study was scoring at level three on a five point scale, which is considered successful; yet the distance from the level four designation has narrowed each year, indicating progress. The secondary school in school zone one was rated at level three each year until 2005, when it dropped to level two, which is considered unsuccessful. The drop was attributed to the dramatic drop in the pass rate on the United States History subject area test from 95.8% to 80.9%, which equates to a 14.9% decline. Though there was no teacher change in this subject and the teacher is nationally board certified, administrators in the building and the instructional coach attribute the drop to health and apathy problems encountered by the teacher that went unnoticed until too late in the school year. At the second school zone under study, the lower elementary school (grades K-2) began in 2002 with an accreditation rating of four, went down to a three in 2003, up to a five in 2004, and back to a four in 2005. Principals and teachers attribute the drop in 2003 to not following the plan devised by the instructional coach to improve math scores, which they implemented in 2004 to enjoy the upgrade in their rating to a level five. Slight modifications in that plan led to a fall the following year. The upper elementary school (grades 3-6) started with a level four performance rating in 2002 but raised that to a level five for 2003 and 2004. In 2005, the rating slipped just slightly below level five. School officials promptly asked the

instructional coach to analyze the scores, along with grade chairs, and make suggestions for improvement. The high school (grades 7-12) obtained an accreditation level of three for 2002 and 2003 but upgraded that status in 2004 and 2005 to a level four, though it is barely above the cut score for that rating. Administrators and teachers in the building ascribe this change to the work that the instructional coach has done with teachers on curriculum mapping and implementation of the strategies under investigation in the monthly book study meetings. (See Appendix A for a table on these accreditation ratings.)

Upon examination of Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) scores, the instructional coaches in both school zones included in this study reported spending significant time with teachers and administrators dissecting the data, discussing specific strengths and weaknesses noted, and developing a plan of action to address identified needs. This process was conducted each school year since the inception of the instructional coaching program in the district. When looking at the trend in MCT scores from 2001 to 2005, school zone one shows an increase in reading, language and math in all grades except second grade reading and language. The instructional coach in that zone stated:

The scores in second grade do not show much change but coaching in that grade was limited by the principal, who directed me specifically to limit time with teachers in kindergarten through second grade. Most of the progress made has been in grades three through eight.

Gains made at a rate above that shown by the state were realized in fourth grade language

and math, fifth grade math, and seventh grade language and math. Teachers attributed these gains to demonstration lessons conducted by the instructional coach on the use of thinking maps when writing and using manipulative components to teach algebraic concepts. One novice teacher specifically thanked the coach by saying:

I am certain that the scores of my students this year were affected by what you did in my classroom. Thank you so much for demonstrating the hands-on math techniques in my class this year. I now have the confidence to do it myself so I know my students in the future will also benefit from what you did to help me. Also, the thinking maps training you did with us has certainly improved the writing of my students. They can organize their thinking much better now – and so can I!

In school zone two, the trend in MCT scores from 2001 to 2005 is up in reading, language and math in all grades except second, fourth, and seventh grade reading. Gains above those earned by the state were noted in this zone in mathematics in grades four, six, seven and eight. The instructional coach assigned to these schools is a math major, therefore is considered expert in the field by teachers, who attest to listening closely to advice given and attempting changes suggested. The administrator of the building said:

All I can say is wow. The teachers that followed the suggestions made by the instructional coach had increased scores. The ones that did not follow the pattern did not have improvements. That tells me what I need to do as an administrator. We'll have everybody on the bandwagon next year.

Gains above those received by the state were noticed in sixth, seventh and eighth grade language. The teachers in those grades were undergoing extensive training during this period of time in the use of writers workshop and other writing strategies, which were reinforced by the instructional coach on a regular basis over a three year period. (See Appendix B for the change in scores from 2001 to 2005 in reading, language and math.)

Improving student writing has been an initiative in the district under study for four years, with teachers in grades two through five undergoing extensive training sessions that are followed-up by the instructional coaches regularly. The state writing assessment is given only in grades four and seven. In school one in this study, the writing mean score in grade four has remained at 2.2 for three years, while the seventh grade mean score has risen from 2.1 to 2.5. Administrators and teachers indicate that fourth grade scores have not shown improvement due to the resistance of the teachers to attempting the strategies learned, while the seventh grade teacher has adopted the program eagerly. In school two, the writing mean score in grade four has fluctuated from 2.3 in 2002 to 2.1 in 2003 then up to 2.4 in 2004 and down to 2.2 in 2005. School personnel explained that during the two years that scores dipped, more than half of the teachers in that grade were new to the district or were beginning teachers and had not received the necessary training. In grade seven at school two, the writing mean score was at 2.4 for two years, then rose to 2.8 in 2004, only to fall to 2.6 in 2005 when all special education student scores were included. The seventh grade scores in this school are at or above the state mean score consistently in writing. When teachers were interviewed

about the scores and their writing assignments, it was noted that teachers with the highest scores on the state writing assessment were those that were fully utilizing techniques learned in training sessions and reinforced by the instructional coach. Teachers with the lowest scores in writing reported that they were not using the strategies often and did not invite the coach to assist them with implementing the district writing initiative. (See Appendix C for mean scores on the state writing assessment.) One teacher that refused assistance from the coach acknowledged her reticence as follows:

I have never really bought into the writing training and just did not want to have the coach come in my classroom because I would feel like I had to follow through. I thought I could get the same results. I guess I was wrong. Next year, I will pay closer attention in our trainings and will even have the coach come help me. It is embarrassing to have the lowest scores in the school. This will not happen to me again.

One of the charges given the instructional coaches from the district at the inception of the program was to decrease the failure rate of students. In school one, the coach set about the task by working with individual teachers to determine strategies to assist struggling learners. In kindergarten through sixth grades, the failure rate decreased from 6.03% in 2002 to 4.9% in 2005, which is a decrease of 1.13%. In grades 7-12, the failure rate fell from 8.97% in 2002 to 5.92% in 2005, representing a drop of 3.05%. At school two, the failure rate dropped by 3.79% in grades K-3, by 7.23% in grades 4-8, and

by 5.59% in grades 9-12 from 2002 to 2005. The instructional coach in this school area indicated that:

the failure rate in each school dropped as a result of a directive issued by the principals to teachers to attend to the issue and to listen to the advice given by the coach. Once the principals stated firmly that the teachers were to truly change their failure rates, I had teachers asking me for help. In some cases, it was a simple matter to fix. Several teachers had the weighting of their grades wrong in the computer grading program. Simply fixing this dropped their failure rate drastically. For others, it was a matter of helping them develop a plan to help their at-risk students and following up to be sure it was done.

In grades four, five and six, the coach worked closely with the teachers upon their request as they were interested in complying with the administrative request and assisting struggling students. Generally, there was a drop in the failure rate of each grade group in each school during the first year of the implementation of the coaching program as this was a focus of the program during that year. (See Appendix D for numbers and percentages of non-promotions by grade.)

Part B: Ascertaining Influence of Coaches on Teacher Effectiveness

To surmise the influence of the instructional coaches on teacher effectiveness, it was necessary to consider whether or not teachers increased the utilization of best practices stated as district initiatives during the implementation of this program. Factors

used for determining the level of teacher change was the number of curriculum maps compiled, the number of interdisciplinary units constructed and implemented, coaching log information, survey data, and interviews.

Curriculum mapping was an initiative undertaken by the district during school year 2001-2002, before the instructional coaching program was instituted. Little progress was made toward gaining teacher compliance with the request by the district to compile this curriculum plan, which would indicate what content and process skills students are expected to master by the end of each course, thereby providing consistency and accountability in the instructional process. At the end of that school year, neither school one nor two had one curriculum map completed. The instructional coaching program was instituted in school year 2002-2003 and at year end, there were still no curriculum maps at school one and school two only had them at grade levels K-2. By the end of 2003-2004, school one had all maps completed kindergarten through grade five, while school two had maps kindergarten through grade eight. By the end of school year 2004-2005, school one had all maps except sixth grade completed and school two had all maps completed. The instructional coaches reported spending hours with teachers in small group settings to assist with completion of the task and to explain the reasoning behind the assignment. One coach summarized the process as follows:

It was often like pulling a wild cat along on a leash. You were afraid to let the cat get behind you because it might attack. Letting it go in front of you was risky because you didn't have complete control over where it

would go. Teacher had a hard time grasping the need for curriculum mapping. In actuality, they just plain didn't want to take the time to do it and would find every way they could to sabotage the process – even attacking the person helping them the most to get the task done. Once they allowed themselves to be tamed, they began to see the benefit and got serious about doing it right. Change is hard.... but it sure is worth it if you stick to it.

At the same time that curriculum maps were being developed, schools began to work on interdisciplinary units in grades three through five. Essentially, no teachers in these schools were teaching in an interdisciplinary format through school year 2002-2003. In school year 2003-2004, both schools tried interdisciplinary units written by the instructional coaches for grades three through five. This spurred teachers at school one to work with the instructional coach to write two units per grade and make a commitment to use these units during school year 2004-2005 on a limited basis and to expand the use the subsequent year. One teacher at this school noted that:

It is easy to see how using interdisciplinary units can be a time saver. I hope we can work together to write several. There is no doubt that the kids will see how subjects connect if we can pull this off.

School two continued to implement the coach-written interdisciplinary units and several teachers requested demonstration lessons from the coach to show them how to integrate lessons. In school year 2005-2006, teachers report a move toward using more

interdisciplinary units and have asked the coach for assistance in constructing the units.

Teachers in grade three at school two are working with the coach to develop interdisciplinary units for the entire school year, complete with literature, math, science, and social studies connections. One third grade teacher stated:

I am fired up about the interdisciplinary units. It is fun to work with another teacher to see a unit take shape. Especially when you can see that what we are asking the kids to do is better since two or three people are working on it. This has opened my eyes to see how habitual I had gotten. All my assignments looked the same. Having these units with a variety of ideas in them available will be great.

In the schools within the context of this study, instructional coaches maintain a coaching log that indicates their daily activities and accomplishments. At year end, the coaches summarize their activities by placing a percentage of time spent on each type of activity undertaken during the school year. The activities listed indicate the level of participation and interaction of teachers within the building with the instructional coach. (See Appendix E for detailed breakdown of activities for two school years.)

In analyzing the list of activities as recorded by each instructional coach in their coaching log, it is apparent that the coach in school one spent roughly seventy-five percent of her time with teachers during school years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, while the coach in school two spent sixty percent of her time with teachers during school year 2003-2004 and changed that to eighty percent the subsequent year. Activities that

involved direct contact with teachers included coaching them on the Accelerated Math and Accelerated Reader programs, gathering instructional resources to help teachers with classroom lesson plans, conducting demonstration lessons, peer coaching, assisting teachers with writing interdisciplinary units and lesson plans, supervising individual and groups of teachers with the construction of curriculum maps, and attending workshops alongside teachers to enhance assistance upon return to the building. The rest of the time spent in the work day by the instructional coach consisted primarily of administrative type duties, including working on special education referral paperwork, assisting specific student or groups of students on test preparation or in testing, organizing the science equipment and materials for classroom use, analyzing test scores and making recommendations to administrators and teachers based on the findings, meeting with principals to discuss issues as they arose, and meeting with other instructional coaches on a weekly basis to remain in line with district initiatives. These administrative type tasks took roughly twenty-five percent of the time of the coach in school one during school years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, while the coach in school two took forty percent of her time in these tasks during school year 2003-2004 but decreased that to twenty percent the following school year. The school one coach stated:

Several things changed during the second and third year of my being the coach in this school. Teachers utilized me more for curriculum issues. They seem to trust me more. My classroom teaching time was more by teacher request than by my suggestion. Teachers are asking for my help

so much now that I can barely get around to all the requests. Maybe we are turning a corner.

When queried about the percentage of time spent in administrative type tasks, both coaches indicated that it is best to reach an eighty/twenty split with the majority of time being spent directly with teachers. According to the coach in school two:

Teachers will only perceive the coach as helpful if they see tangible ways the coach has assisted them. For instance, I spent ten percent of my time one year setting up the science work room by ordering proper books and materials, designing experiment ideas, and setting up a schedule for teachers to utilize the equipment and resources in their classrooms with my assistance. As that year progressed, I began to see that teachers appreciated the effort I was spending on their behalf and they were more willing to try what I suggested because they saw how hard I was working.

Both coaches agreed that it is imperative that teachers never see them as an administrator. This is sometimes extremely difficult since coaches are often assigned administrative type tasks. Yet, to maintain the trust and confidence of the teachers, the coach must find a way to comply with the directives of the principals and district office personnel while finding a way to spend the vast majority of their time being supportive to teachers. One coach reiterated this point by saying that:

As long as the teacher thinks she can confide in you as a coach, it is possible to help the teacher improve. If the teacher ever thinks you are evaluating her and giving feedback to the principal, you are sunk. I've had to flatly tell the principal no when asked to elaborate on the classroom problems a teacher was having. It's a really delicate issue. But that teacher has to trust you or they will never try the strategies you are suggesting.

After analyzing survey and interview data gathered from principals, it was apparent that principals view the job function of the instructional coach as being developed around the needs of the teacher. In answer to each question regarding how the coach has helped with curriculum mapping, creating integrated units, raising writing skills, decreasing failure rates, and implementing district initiatives, principals indicated that the instructional coach provides strategies and constructive feedback to individual teachers, models the practice required, provides resources needed, remains readily available as the teachers attempt the new technique or make the change desired, and supports teachers during the growth process. One principal noted:

Without the instructional coach, it is doubtful that many of the instructional initiatives would get done. Principals have limited time to devote to these issues. The coach takes the initiative, keeps me constantly updated, and works right in the classroom with the teachers on whatever they have said they need help with. She has assisted every department in

utilizing the resources that had lain dormant for so long. All my teachers welcome her input as well as her ideas and strategies. Our students respond eagerly because they know they will learn when she is present.

Another principal stated that the instructional coach:

has expertise with content and teaching strategies that are an excellent resource for the principal. The input of the coach has become a valuable part of decision making within the building about all issues that are instructional as her opinion is usually dead on right. She has the pulse of our building and really knows what our teachers are thinking and needing.

Other specifics mentioned by more than one principal during the interview and survey process were related to the relationship skills that are needed for effective coaching. The principal from school one stated:

Thank goodness my coach is self motivated and has initiative. I can count on her to develop a plan, run it by me for approval and then put a plan into action. The teachers know she has my backing but they also see her staying late most days to gather resources requested or to meet with teacher groups. They know she cares about them and they depend on her for advice and expertise.

The principal at school two denoted:

Our coach is the most focused person in the building. She is determined to make improvements in student achievement. That means she holds teachers to the tasks set forth. But, she doesn't leave the teachers hanging. She works with them to accomplish what needs to be done. They know she is working as hard as they are. That is real important. If that were not the case, the teachers would not listen to her at all. That is why our coach was underutilized the first year we had her. It took time for the teachers to trust her and see her commitment to our school and their students.

The instructional coach is often instrumental in making certain that district initiatives are priorities within the school and bring in training and resources necessary to make changes happen. One coach commented:

I work hard to make sure our teachers and administrators are aware of the instructional initiatives that are set by the district. My position provides a vital link between the district office and the local school. If I were not there to clarify the initiatives, there would be misunderstanding and even non-compliance out of lack of information.

School administrators in this study did not note many problems associated with having an instructional coach within their building. The issue of time was presented as an obstacle by one:

There is never enough time in the day. I like to meet with my instructional coach at least once a week to outline the goals for the week and catch up

on her perception of progress made. We are usually able to do this but we rarely have the opportunity to discuss all the issues that arise in detail. Even more, the time factor affects her job. She has to meet with teachers during that small window of opportunity during their planning time, before school when they are really focused on starting the day, or in the afternoon when they are too tired to concentrate. This hinders progress some. We are exploring ways to extend contact time between the coach and teachers that are in need of assistance.

The time problems noted by the administrators are summed up in this statement made by one principal:

The needs in my school are greater than one coach can handle effectively. Our coach is split between the three schools in my zone so she is not with me all the time. We are selfish and don't want to share her! We are just glad we have access to her expertise. Our district recognizes the necessity of providing quality professional training to teachers. The only way that can truly be effective is if it is available as the questions arise. In a perfect world, that instructional leadership would be provided by the principal but that is not even remotely possible. The coach can be more available to the teachers plus is less of a threat to their jobs than seeking help from the principal.

Part C: Ascertaining Influence of Coaches on Teachers

In considering the influence of coaching on teacher effectiveness, several district documents were analyzed. The district under study had collected teacher survey data regarding the instructional coaching program for two school years (2003-2004 and 2004-2005). This data was collated and coded for recurrent themes and responses from teachers. Topics addressed included instructional initiatives valued by the district and local school. These were curriculum mapping, creating integrated lesson plans, raising writing skills of students, decreasing student failure rates, and implementing grade specific instructional strategies that were covered in professional development sessions attended by teachers and administrators.

When asked in an interview setting about how the coach helped them with curriculum mapping, teachers responded that the coach helped them with ideas about authentic assessments, with how to match appropriate assessments to activities and objectives, with organizing the maps, and with deepening the level of difficulty of the curriculum. One teacher noted that the coach:

helped us plan thoroughly for the next school year and had many suggestions that will be exciting for the students and interesting to teach.

In regard to assistance received in writing integrated lesson plans, teachers consistently reported during interviews conducted and in survey data collected that the coach willingly shared her expertise in creating activities and assessments, worked alongside teachers to make the task progress at a good speed, pointed out places in the

curriculum where subjects cross naturally, worked with teachers during their planning periods to gather resources for writing, provided feedback to indicate a pace and flow of activities so student interest would be maximized, and reviewed project ideas to suggest connections. A middle school teacher indicated that the coach:

opened my eyes to the possibility of planning with a teacher in another discipline to show students how the ideas connect across language arts and social studies. This made the material more relevant to the students. For the first time, I saw excitement for the topic and class discussion was richer than ever before because of the connections students made to other subjects and ultimately to their own lives.

Numerous teachers indicated getting substantial help from the instructional coach on raising writing skills among their students. Assistance took the form of demonstration lessons taught, suggesting writing topics, leading teachers through the writing process steps over a period of time, discussing with students the importance of writing, grading papers alongside the teacher, giving tips on motivating students to write, providing resource books on the teaching of writing, showing teachers how to incorporate writing into mathematics and science, sharing internet links on writing, and teaching educators that summarization skills lead to improved reading comprehension. Several teachers credit the instructional coach with raising their writing scores but one upper elementary teacher specifically stated:

The coach spent three intense weeks helping me with writing in my classroom because I had no idea where to start but I knew my students were not writing at the level that was expected of them. She worked directly with my students on the writing process but I learned more than they did. I now feel comfortable and competent with taking my students through the steps to write more effective papers. This year, my class even created a book written by students and published for parents and the community to buy. It was a big hit.

Not many teachers reported seeking the advice of the instructional coach on ways to decrease their classroom failure rate. Yet, many pointed out that they adopted suggestions made by the coach to assist struggling learners. The tips followed included: adjusting the weight given to specific types of assignments in the grading program, collaborating as a grade level to set consistent grading practices, finding tutors for struggling students, decreasing the amount of homework assigned or the percentage of importance placed on it in the grading program, accepting no zeros, trying re-teaching ideas that are different from traditional approaches, setting a classroom policy of excellence so that all students know that success is the expectation and perform accordingly, suggesting incentives that actually motivate students to achieve better grades, discussing strategies to improve comprehension skills, and writing lesson plans with special needs students in mind. One teacher gave testimony that:

I had grown hard hearted, I guess. I thought all students had to conform to what I expected. The coach helped me to see that students have special needs and some have just fallen through the cracks and can perform well if given a boost and convinced that they have the potential to do well. I was amazed at what a little positive reinforcement and use of alternate strategies like teaching with manipulatives could do to improve student understanding of the content. I am certain now that I will do my best to teach every kind of student that comes into classroom. Failure is no longer an option or easy way out in my class.

Teachers in the schools under study are required by the district to attend specified professional development sessions that detail district instructional initiatives, giving teachers specific strategies to use in the classroom. Most teachers surveyed indicate getting some level of assistance from the instructional coach on one or more of these topics, which include: using science kits ordered, teaching on block schedule, using inquiry based science style instructional practices, increasing the use of experimentation in science, enhancing the use of calculators in math and science instruction, using manipulatives in math and social studies, creating thematic units, incorporating writing into all disciplines, and improving study skills. Example after example were given in the survey data of ways the coach had assisted with these tasks. One teacher described how the coach:

put together science kits for each unit we teach. The kits showed teachers how to use inquiry based teaching plus had experiments that we could do in class. The units even incorporated use of calculators and writing within creative projects that were so motivational to students that I had to make them stop working on the science unit to move on to other subjects.

Another teacher wrote:

Our coach helped me by securing a videoflex camera that attaches to the microscope to display images on the television plus she worked hard to get me the best calculators to use in my class. Every teacher in our building can name some resource or material that the coach got for them to use in their class. But she doesn't stop there. She actually shows the teacher how to use the new materials so that saves us time plus insures that we will actually use it.

A teacher new to the profession commented:

The coach has been my mentor and a source of guidance for all district guidelines. She has continued to work with me and answer all my questions about writing lesson plans, implementing the science kits, and using the writing strategies. She is my teacher! Her services have been endless and immeasurable.

A high school teacher wrote:

Our coach tries to find new and improved ways to help teachers make learning more productive. Her insight and knowledge are a great help to every teacher and, ultimately, the students. We are very fortunate to have someone on campus with so much passion for the learning process.

Interviews held with teachers about the instructional coach yielded consistent commentary about the importance of having an instructional specialist accessible to teachers within the building. One elementary teacher said:

The coach is our saving grace when it comes to knowing how to write thematic units, differentiated activities, and student improvement plans. She meets with us once a week to help us. She is our biggest supporter when it comes to getting the best resources and ideas for helping students. She has critiqued me and given me hints on how to improve and I never felt threatened by her. Her willingness to help me identify individual student problems and develop solutions is invaluable. The students respect her. She stops by the room and interacts with them, praising them for doing good work or trying a new tactic. There just isn't enough of her to go around!

A teacher that had been placed on job target by the administration went out of her way to state her appreciation for what the coach had done to help by saying:

The coach came to my room for an hour twice a day for two weeks to help me with improving on the areas my principal told me to work toward changing. I listened and learned from this pro. She helped me without making me feel inferior and I quickly found that the suggestions she gave worked with my class. I know I still have lots to learn and I will never hesitate to ask the coach for help.

A veteran teacher of twenty-five years stated that:

It's hard to admit that you have not been getting the maximum learning power out of your students. When I opened up my classroom to a demonstration lesson by the coach, I never thought I would learn anything that would change my teaching. Boy, was I ever wrong. I am now using the strategies she demonstrated and my children are thinking on a higher level and progressing at a faster rate.

Consistent themes that ran through the interviews with teacher grade chairs (one per grade at each school in the study) relative to the kind of assistance provided by the coach were:

- Training – the coach provides short lessons on topics of relevance to teachers at the school building, meeting teacher immediate needs. This is done through meetings during plan time, faculty meetings before and after school hours, demonstration lessons, classroom observations followed by feedback, and at regularly scheduled grade level meetings.

- Resources – the coach works toward obtaining materials and resources that teachers indicate are necessary for accomplishing their instructional goals. Further, the coach makes certain that teachers know how to use the materials and follows up to insure use of the materials.
- Planning – the coach assists teachers with planning lessons that will be used immediately and with preparing for the future through writing of curriculum maps that show the pacing and depth of curriculum to be covered. Further, coaches help teachers develop alternate activities and assessments for struggling learners.
- Assessment – coaches give teachers feedback on issues relative to assessing student progress, whether it be to analyze performance on statewide test scores, look at student performance on a teacher made test, consider the grading scale to determine if it is reflective of student performance, or to analyze an assignment to ascertain ways for making it more effective in measuring student growth.
- Communication – coaches are a liaison between administrators at all levels and the classroom teacher, clarifying directives and initiatives so teachers are able to effectively comply with the requests, procedures and policies.
- Accountability – teachers worry about test scores and student achievement due to state and federal directives pursuant to No Child Left Behind

legislation. Instructional coaches are viewed by teachers as a resource to use in working toward improving their school and their personal skills.

Question two addressed the roles served by the instructional coaches that influenced student performance and teacher practice. Teachers were impacted by the existence of a person that could be depended upon to provide training as they needed it, as well as the resources to accomplish the goal. Further, teachers appreciate the assistance provided by the coach in planning quality lessons and accompanying assessments. The communication link provided by the coach between teachers and administrators is a key factor in aligning all elements of the school with accountability issues.

Question #3: What hindrances or problems are perceived by educators encountering an instructional coach within a school?

As with any program, it is important to consider concerns or hindrances that evolve during the implementation of the strategy or change. When instructional coaches are added to the school environment, the equilibrium or status quo is upset; hence problems will inevitably arise. One of the most predominant concerns was voiced by one teacher as follows:

We did not trust the coach when she first came to our school. We were all certain that she was sent by district office to spy on us and our principal since they were not happy with our test scores. No one wanted her around. It took me a whole semester to see that she was really just there to

help us. I thought her expectations of our kids was way too high but then I listened to her experiences and watched her with my own students and I began to realize that I really could learn something from her. Then the real problem became not having enough time to get with the coach for help and to discuss certain students and what to do about them.

Though the first chasm to overcome between coach and teacher may be in developing a sincere level of professional and personal trust, great strides can be made once this issue is resolved. Teachers can utilize the coach as a confidante, a resource for assisting with student motivational and instructional problems, and a source for communicating district and school priorities within a context pertinent to classroom level instructors. One teacher expressed a need for continual contact with her coach:

It is hard to believe that I once had to go through the school year guessing so much about what my principal wanted and about what the district was talking about in our professional development sessions. I never had anyone to talk to that could make sense of it all. Now that we have the instructional coach located within our building, getting an answer is just a few steps away. She clarifies issues for me and other teachers, especially at grade level meetings. On top of that, she gives very specific advice when I ask questions about how to get the most out of my top level or struggling students. That advice is always helpful and it addresses the needs of the child academically as well as emotionally. It's amazing how

helpful the coach is. All the teachers would agree that we are certainly lucky to have a seasoned educator close at hand that is not our boss that is so willing to help. The real problem with all this is that there is never enough time to get together to ask those burning questions or to really discuss the solutions with colleagues.

Often a concern of teachers revolves around feeling judged by the instructional coach. Some feel that the coach knows too much about their classroom practices and, therefore, might serve as an informant to the building administrator about their shortcomings. In some cases, teachers are worried that they are not measuring up to expectations of the school as they are not properly versed in best practice strategies or on the particular initiatives or expressed priorities of the school. Others are more concerned that the coach is a hidden evaluator, as is expressed by one teachers as follows:

I cringed every time the coach stepped into my room when she first came. I thought the principal sent her there to find out what I was doing wrong. It took me a whole year to figure out that she really wasn't sharing the problems she saw with our principal. Now I ask her opinion all the time. She probably hates to see me coming.

Initiative, or lack thereof, can be a major hindrance to the operation of an instructional coaching program. If a school hired a coach that lacked the personal drive to do quality work, a major problem could quickly develop with teachers perceiving that the coach is not busy nor helping the instructional staff meet accountability issues. This

issue is highlighted within the words of one coach, who indicates in the statement below that the task to complete may not be readily apparent nor assistance welcomed.

Consequently, the instructional coach must be persistent in noticing where assistance is needed, communicate a helpful nature, and generate a steady stream of visible tasks completed that are readily apparent to teachers and administrators as being useful to the core mission of the school. This need for aggressive and unrelenting attention to instructional details is advocated by a coach:

The first year on the job, I often had to create my own work. Very few teachers asked for my help, particularly that first semester. I had to solicit rooms to do demonstration lessons in and even randomly dropped in rooms just to work with students or help a teacher with a project. Now my calendar stays full. I am always fully scheduled every week – and sometimes I am booked up weeks in advance. It's just great!

Administrators and teachers usually echo each other in praising coaches that are determined to assist the school in accomplishing its stated mission. But coaches cannot be successful in their endeavors unless there is proper administrative support of the coaching program and the processes that are necessary to make coaching a successful undertaking within the school. Indeed, the building administrator influences the outcome of the overall program but also of each individual task instigated by the coach. Without continuous and vocal support of the school principal, coaching success will be limited

severely. The principal at one school made a comment about his own administrative support of the school coach:

I wanted the coach at my school to be successful. I figured she could make me look good if I backed her ... and I was right. I told the teachers from the beginning that whatever the coach told them to do, it was like me telling them. The one time I didn't heed my own advice, I made a huge mistake. I told the teachers not to worry about writing so much since it isn't a part of the accountability system. My coach had warned me that this was not a good idea. Wanting to lighten the load of my teachers a little, I went ahead with my statement. The result was a dramatic drop in my school's writing scores, as well as our language scores on the MCT. She was right. I will listen carefully to her counsel in the future and actively show my support of her efforts. This incident proved to me beyond a shadow of a doubt that I must be careful to support what my coach is doing and do it out loud. I have discovered that even my best teachers only assign credibility to the coach's efforts if I have validated the process.

One of the greatest hindrances to the success of an instructional coaching program is the belief system of the individuals involved. When the administrator or core influential teachers do not agree with the expectations set by the coach for students or for the faculty at large, conflict can erupt or the predominant attitude can prevail, thus

defeating the efforts of the coach to motivate staff to hold students to ever higher standards or expectations. One of the coaches that has been successful in making a shift in expectation level set by the teachers and school commented:

It was obvious when I first came to the school that the teachers and administrators didn't really believe the students could perform much better than they were doing. The teachers thought I was totally unrealistic in what I was asking them to cover with the students. I was appalled at their low expectations but didn't confront them directly. Instead, I demonstrated for them what could be done. Now I can really see that attitude shifting. It's wonderful to watch. Our kids are just as smart as kids anywhere in this district – or in this state. And we are finally beginning to believe that, which means a great change is closing in. But I am lucky. I have heard horror stories from other coaches that their efforts to make the same kind of shift in their schools and they have hit a brick wall. There is a delicate balance to getting a faculty to make the shift. Somehow they have to be convinced of the possibilities that their students hold. Plus, the educators have to begin to believe that they have the ability and the stamina to move the same students along that they couldn't seem to push, drag or otherwise motivate to achieve before. Attitude is everything – for the adults as well as the children.

The training level of an instructional coach can be a significant issue when judging the success of a coaching program. In any new coach, the learning curve is lengthy, particularly if the coach is new to the district to which they are assigned. A coach must get to know the strengths and needs of the faculty and administration, must assess the achievement challenges of the student body, must develop a trusting relationship while communicating effectively with all stakeholders, and must not appear judgmental while offering constructive advice to novice as well as veteran educators. As if this were not a daunting enough task, the instructional coach must also be an expert in instructional strategies and assessment techniques. This is often a real issue. It is rare that a coach, when first employed in such a position, would have all the training necessary for working effectively with adults, much less possess all the requisite skills for communicating best practice techniques to teachers with a wide variety of backgrounds and levels of expertise. Frustration can be discerned in the testimony of one coach after only a week in the position:

Okay. So I'm supposed to already know all about adult learning theory and how to talk to people who were my peers last week as if I am now suddenly an expert for them to value what I say. On top of that, I am supposed to have all the answers to their questions about curriculum, instructional practices and methods of assessment. Yeah, right. Then I get overwhelmed when I find out that I am supposed to help teachers lower failure rates, analyze test scores and write a pacing guide for a

curriculum to insure that students will be more successful next year on the statewide testing program. Oh yes, and that the principals wants me to be certain that the teachers with lowest scores pull their performance up because he wants our school accreditation level to shoot up since I am here. Okay. That is real pressure. Add to the top of that the resentment in the eyes of some teachers, the wariness in others. Just getting these people to trust me and listen to what I suggest will be a major task this school year. Maybe if I just keep plodding along and accomplish one thing at a time, I'll make progress. It's hard to be patient and move slow enough with teachers when the administration is expecting real results, not just a slight movement. I'm wondering why I accepted this job. It is certainly going to be more stressful than working with my precious angels in my own classroom haven.

Concerns and hindrances consistently mentioned during teacher interviews regarding the coaching program in their school included:

- Evaluation – teachers said that they did not trust the coach until they were assured by the administration and the coach repeatedly that the coach would not conduct evaluations of teachers. Only after observing this as true over time did teachers begin to open their classrooms willingly to the coach for assistance and advice.

- Time – there never seems to be enough time in the school day for teachers to access the expertise of the coach. Once teachers realize the potential for help, they seek opportunities to discuss issues with the coach and try to schedule her time. It is hard for the coach to allot each teacher sufficient individualized time, as well as attend departmental and grade level meetings with groups of teachers to problem solve and extend professional learning.
- Administrative Support – teachers indicate that their personal level of support for the coaching program directly mirrors the attitude of the principal toward the program. If the initiatives pushed by the coach are not simultaneously backed by the administrator, problems arise with the level of compliance and teacher enthusiasm. Additionally, the efforts and enthusiasm of the coach can be suppressed should the building administrator fail to support the efforts of the coach adequately, as success will be hindered.
- Expectations – teachers are often anxious and concerned about accountability issues and high expectations set. They say they want to set the bar high for students but, at the same time, they want reasonable expectations for the performance of their school and themselves personally, hence resulting in practices that set the bar lower than it should be set for many students, both struggling and gifted.

- Training – coaches will require significant outlay of training investment in order to pay dividends for the school or district. Coaches must be well versed in the strategies valued by the district, as well as be knowledgeable about adult learning theory to the point that they are competent and facile in the use of strategies that promote learning in teachers.

Summation of Information Gathered from Coaches

The coaches provide valuable insight into their roles and the hindrances they face in the accomplishment of their job, as pertains to the three research questions addressed within this study. In discussing their job functions, the following comments were made:

Teachers look to me as a source of information and assistance. I help them locate resources for teaching, run interference with the principal when necessary, listen when they encounter problems so they can work toward solutions, and make sure they attend the professional training sessions required by the district. In doing these things, I can work up to the level of effecting change. But there are many stumbling blocks along the way. Trust is key to success.

In regard to question one that seeks to describe roles served by the instructional coaches that improve student achievement, those providing that service to teachers indicted that they are:

- A sounding board for teachers, therefore must be good listeners;
- A change agent who must convince teachers that they are their advocate;

- A professional development tool, providing teachers with on-site training as needs arise;
- A liaison between faculty, principals and district office personnel that works to influence decisions made so that teacher needs are considered;
- A resource for teachers to access on whatever content or pedagogical topic that confronts them;
- A quality control worker that attempts to insure that instruction is aligned with state standards, thereby creating the potential for students to attain the learning standards.

Interview data gathered from the two instructional coaches is central to the findings of this study as their comments can be helpful to others attempting to implement a coaching program. Interviews conducted with the coaches sought to address research question number two by addressing how roles served by the instructional coach influence student achievement and teacher practice. When asked what they have done to strategically assist the school and district in implementing instructional initiatives (curriculum mapping, construction of integrated units, decreasing failure rates, improving writing skills, etcetera), the instructional coaches indicated that the most effective strategies had been:

- Holding regularly scheduled grade level meetings on specific issues;

- Conducting professional development ‘mini-lessons’ on issues as they arise within a grade grouping or with specific teachers so that the learning is specific to identified teacher needs or questions;
- Conducting demonstration lessons and then having the teacher teach a similar lesson while the coach watches and later discusses it with the teacher (observation with feedback – not connected to evaluation);
- Writing lesson plans, science experiments, curriculum maps, and interdisciplinary units alongside teachers to demonstrate what best practices should be included and develop a collaborative environment;
- Working alongside teachers in the classroom with the use of manipulative in math and social studies and with experiments conducted in science until they feel competent in the use to the new materials and strategies;
- Assisting teachers in developing alternate instructional and assessment strategies for working with at-risk or struggling students (yielding differentiated instructional practices for all learners);
- Discussing new ideas and in small grade level or type specific groups to work out problems before implementation;
- Ordering materials and resources needed by teachers, placing them within the school in an organized manner for easy access, and training teachers in using the materials effectively;

- Analyzing assignments in small groups to improve the wording and content of the assignment, leading to improved student understanding and performance on the task;
- Celebrating successes when teachers see that their efforts in analyzing test scores and following a plan developed directly from the data improved student achievement;
- Reviewing grading practices with individual teachers and with grade groupings to build a standard and unified procedure with grade appropriate progression;
- Communicating with teachers in written form regularly (bi-monthly) regarding meeting dates, decisions made, materials received, ideas shared by fellow teachers, websites available, etcetera.

Increasing student academic achievement is the ultimate goal of the instructional coaches. The coach at school two, in her frustration with impacting the depth of instruction going on within the middle school science classrooms, attempted to influence instruction by modeling a series of lessons in a classroom where students lacked basic scientific skills and did not understand concepts already presented. After several lessons, the coach commented:

Students are excited about science now and anticipate the classes I am teaching, to the point that they are asking me every day if I am going to be a guest teacher. The host teacher has noticed that the kids are able to use

correct scientific vocabulary in their discussions but claims he does not have a clue how I accomplished that. I am working one-on-one with him to show him how to put the depth into the lessons so that he can experience the same success. Often, though, I feel like the teachers are working very hard at spinning their wheels and going nowhere. It takes some teachers longer than others to catch on to the techniques that work with students. It is important not to give up as the coach, just as you don't want teachers to ever give up on a student.

When asked for specifics about what coaches do toward that improving student performance, the coaches responded that they:

- Encourage teachers to continue education at the master's level or above, as well as attempt national board certification status;
- Help teachers focus on instruction and best practices by zeroing in on specific needs relentlessly;
- Model for teachers how to observe and devise plans to help individual students based on their particular needs, providing strategies and materials to assist them then making certain that the teachers follow through;
- Develop a rapport with teachers so they believe that the coach is accessible and supportive when they have questions or needs;

- Identify school and individual student weaknesses from test data, observation, and reviewing assignments then use that information to develop and implement a plan of action;
- Focus on specific target areas for improvement until progress is noted then build upon that success to meet another identified goal.

The issue of developing rapport and relationships was recurrent throughout the data gathered from the coaches. Both felt strongly that little could be accomplished until trust and a strong foundation of support were built between the teachers and the coach.

One coach indicated that:

My greatest success this school year has been to gain the confidence of the teachers in my ability to help them. Instead of me creating work for myself in classrooms, I am working nonstop directly with teachers on issues they bring up. This has made it possible to actually change teaching behavior and even attitudes of a handful of teachers. As a result, the administration listens closely to my input on policy and practice discussions. I can see my influence in every decision and document created by the school.

Research question number three addresses hindrances perceived by educators encountering an instructional coach within the school. Concerns or problems perceived by the instructional coaches when working with teachers and administrators within the schools were detailed as follows:

- Change is perceived as a threat by many teachers. Many are unwilling to change and try new strategies (even when they see it work for their cohorts).
- High expectations are not set for all children. It is hard to change a belief system in some educators that not all students can perform adequately;
- Administrators want the coach to serve in an evaluative position at times. This can be very destructive to the coaching relationship. One coach stated that,

teachers don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. If the coach is forced into an evaluative role, the role and teacher helper is forever compromised;

- Time is never sufficient. It is difficult to find enough time to work with individual teachers long enough to make a lasting impact;
- Administrators within the building do not enforce or support district initiatives, therefore send a message that is opposite from that delivered by the coach. This causes confusion within the building. Clear and consistent communication from district and local school administrators is essential;
- Devising and communicating a plan of school improvement can be difficult when the entire faculty does not understand the necessity, is resistant, or does not have proper training to implement the changes. It is

hard to have patience with the slow pace of progress and it is particularly difficult when the coach is expected to be the initiator of the change process, the communicator of the steps for reaching chosen goals, the cheerleader along the path, and the person to sell the process to resisters.

Summary

It is difficult for coaches to fill the multiple roles expected of them simultaneously. However, due to their high level of commitment and professionalism, those in this study attempted to meet the complex challenges posed by the teachers, principals and district level administrators associated with the coaching program.

Instructional coaches serve as true catalysts for change within the local school setting. Their success depends on the level of support given by the administrators, as this one factor influences the perception of teachers regarding the position and its potential benefits for the classroom teacher and the students within the building. Given sufficient backing from the school and district level, the instructional coaches in this study can communicate need for change to teachers, provide professional training and appropriate resources, assist with planning quality lessons and assessments, and work with teachers to insure that accountability measures show student academic progress.

An upper elementary teacher summed up the situation by saying,

Our coach is very helpful to us. We don't really realize it until she isn't around to help us. I can't imagine not having that resource so easily

available during the school day. The coach pumps us up when we get down, challenges us to constantly push the students, and stimulates pride in our accomplishments. Our school is a better place because our coach cares and is so productive with her time.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Though the principal is recognized as the instructional leader of the school, a recent trend in public education has been to hire instructional coaches to assist with the daily task of guiding teachers through implementation of best practice strategies within the classroom (Taylor, 2004; Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003). This is happening in part due to school and district attempts to measure up to the guidelines established as a result of the No Child Left Behind legislation, which calls for greater accountability within local schools. Additionally, the trend has developed as a result of studies that have shown that job embedded professional training is more effective than traditional one day workshops as a collaborative culture develops in which educators focus on improving student learning as a team effort (The Aspen Institute, 2003; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the roles played by instructional coaches in two schools in the third largest school district within the state of Mississippi, determine how the roles served by the instructional coaches influence student performance and teacher practice, and note what hindrances or problems are

perceived by educators when encountering the instructional coach within the school environment. Few studies have been conducted that connect improvement in student achievement and enhanced teacher practice to the presence of coaches within the school setting.

Conclusions

1. Instructional coaching has great potential for bringing about school improvement. Though coaching programs have taken many different formats, with a variety of titles and job descriptions, the concept has great merit as the resultant climate yields teacher attempts at new strategies on defined needs areas, accompanied by constructive feedback and change in behavior. Placing instructional coaches within schools makes professional growth convenient, collegial, continuous, and responsive to direct teacher needs and requests. Further, coaches can differentiate the training to appropriately touch novice and experienced teachers, decreasing the isolation of all. In the district under study, principals in schools without coaches clamor for the same instructional support person to be added to their faculties as they have witnessed the difference the coaching program has made in participant schools. Teachers in individual schools can pinpoint specific ways the coach has been of assistance to them and to particular students.

2. The principal of the school must visibly and vocally back the coach if success is to be possible. In the schools scrutinized during this investigation, it became apparent that the program was moving forward at a faster pace than the other schools. Upon close

examination of the differences, it was noted by this researcher that the principal in the school with a highly successful coaching program was quick to support the coach when any teacher questioned decisions and voiced the expectation that all teachers were to listen, learn, participate and cooperate as the focus of the team was to improve the performance of the students. This principal held regular meetings with his instructional coach in order to remain abreast of instructional activities going on within the building. In the school with the less successful coaching program, the principal avoided contact with the coach and rarely referred to her duties during faculty meetings. Teachers accessed help from the coach in finding resource materials but did not value the coaching program at the same level as teachers in the other building during the first year of program implementation.

3. The presence of an instructional coach draws the focus of the school to curriculum development, best practice instructional strategies, and reaching student achievement goals. Teachers were able to discuss new ideas and ask questions of another professional without fear of appearing incompetent or receiving a negative evaluation. Getting a fresh point of view was often quite helpful to teachers, especially relative to student interaction and learning difficulty issues. The coach provided this feedback in a non-threatening format. The coach can work with individuals, small groups or whole faculties to define needs and increase teacher capacity and confidence in their abilities. This leads to school-wide change. In the schools under study, curriculum maps and integrated units that did not exist before the coaching program was instituted now are

available on the district website for teachers to access. Teachers regularly discuss best practice instructional strategies during monthly or bi-monthly meetings and are collectively reading a text for a study book session held monthly. All teachers are more aware of student performance on state assessments but are also beginning to focus on classroom assessments and assignments in order to make them more instructive and productive.

4. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 increased the tendency of school districts to hire coaches. The district under study implemented its coaching program as a result of searching for ways to improve student performance so that meeting the growth goals established by NCLB would be possible.

5. Teachers value peer interaction and ‘just in time’ professional training, therefore will value an in-school coach as soon as she is deemed trustworthy. Teachers need someone whose job is dedicated to designing opportunities for collegial interaction, reflection, and feedback in a non-evaluative setting. This needs to be conducted on lessons actually delivered, future plans, common problems, and actual student work. Providing time for teachers to engage in these activities will increase their willingness to take a risk and try new strategies, participate in joint work, converse about problems they are encountering, and benefit from peer review. Teachers within the schools included in this study invariably stated in surveys and interviews that they appreciate the short, mini-lessons provided by the coach during their planning time or just after school since this

addressed direct instructional issues they were facing and provided them with an immediate solution or understanding of the idea.

6. It is imperative that instructional coaches are familiar with adult learning theory and brain based research. The instructional coaches that were integral to this study asked for training in these two subjects mid-year of their first year in service, stating that they desperately needed to know how to ask the right questions to start teachers thinking about their practice without causing them to become defensive. To work effectively with adult learners, a coach must understand how best to listen to the expressed needs of the individual, pose the proper questions for eliciting the desired response, assist with setting priorities for addressing those requests, and devise solutions collaboratively with the adult so that ultimate buy-in is achieved. Additionally, teachers are quite interested in current brain research when it is presented to them in a way that they can incorporate the ideas into their practice immediately. Coaches need to be well versed in these strategies.

7. Coaches must take the career stages of teachers into consideration as training plans are developed. The ultimate in design is to achieve a situation in which teacher provide input in to their own learning to the point that the topic and style are self-directed by the learner. This would allow room for devising professional development opportunities that fit each individual teacher, whether at the beginning stages of their career or at the advanced level. Additionally, it is best when participation is voluntary and when teachers become critical thinkers who collaborate in a reflective environment

that provides mutual respect. These conditions will most likely not be possible at the inception of a coaching program but may emerge over time. In the district under study, the professional development plans formulated from the district level are presently targeted toward the needs of a particular grade level or subject area. However, coaches at the local sites work toward differentiating the training follow-ups to match the learning needs of various groups of teachers.

8. A particularly effective activity that can be performed by the instructional coach is to demonstrate lessons in a classroom then observe the teacher in attempting the same strategy, followed by feedback and discussion. Since research shows that learners remember ninety percent of what they apply, this activity holds the potential of causing lasting change in instructional practice. Additionally, it is a great model as it shows teachers first hand that learners do best by doing, whether they are children or adults. In school two of this study, the coach spent considerable time during her second year on the job doing demonstration lessons on using manipulatives to teach algebraic concepts in grades five and six. Teachers observed the lesson first then repeated it with a class while the coach watched and assisted. After going through a series of these demonstrations and observations, followed by discussion and feedback, teachers adopted the techniques and it is now common practice in the teaching of math in this school. This same strategy was used by the coach in school one with the institution of the use of concept maps to take notes, summarize an idea or event, and as a prewriting tool. The same positive results were noted, with teachers taking on the strategy as a regular tool to use in teaching.

9. The instructional coach within a school must select the model that best fits the school and various groups of teachers and implement those models simultaneously. Potential models, as described in chapter one of this study, include lesson study, peer coaching, cognitive coaching, mentoring, expert coaching, challenge coaching, critical friend meetings, and learning walks. The coach must take the role as the leader by organizing the professional training around a selected model and guiding the experience so as to deepen teacher content and pedagogical knowledge. Both coaches involved in this study indicated that it was difficult during the first two years of the program inception to juggle the different types of groups but are beginning to feel competent with designing different learning situations for teachers as they gain more experience on the job.

10. Transferability of the results of this study to other districts must be determined by the reader. For another district to obtain similar results, it may be necessary for that district to provide the same level of support as is offered by the district in this study. Instructional coaches in this district gather weekly with a district level administrator to discuss priorities and problems. That administrator is the principal investigator of this study and instituted the coaching program, so has a vested interest in the success of the program. It is doubtful that a district that did not provide the same level of district commitment to the process would obtain the same results.

11. The financial outlay required to institute the instructional coaching program is worth the expenditure. Numerous professional education organizations tout the

utilization of job embedded professional development opportunities for teachers, inclusive of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Staff Development Council, the American Association of School Administrators, the Association of Supervisors of Curriculum Development, the Southern Region Education Board, the Mid-Continent Regional Education Laboratory, and the Northeast Regional Educational Laboratory. Each of these organizations regularly publish articles in their journals relative to the coaching process and its benefits.

12. Results of the instructional coaching program may not be noted in the first year as the coach must develop a bond of trust with the teachers so they will have the confidence to attempt the tasks suggested. Additionally, the coach must get a feel for how to do the job and what techniques will lead to change in behavior of teachers . However, in the district under study, principals and teachers in the two school zones under study attributed improvement in student achievement (test scores) to the functions performed by the coaches on staff. Other principals in the district, hearing from the teachers and administrators in the four schools housing the coaching program, began to insist on having this same advantage as all are judged against the same accreditation standards. This may have been due to the fact that the district chose schools that had the greatest deficits in scores or it may be attributable to the fact that the coaches were a good match for the setting to which they were assigned.

13. It is difficult to select the right coach for the job. In seeking the services of an instructional coach, a district will be looking to hire a super educator. This person

must have excellent grasp of at least one content area, has to have a vast repertoire of pedagogical knowledge and classroom management strategies, possess excellent people skills, understand adult learning theory, be innovative yet determined to get results, exhibit a calm demeanor when mediating situations, be perceived as friendly and inclusive, know where to find resources, have good questioning skills, and be so committed to task as to be perceived as persistent. This mix of quality professional and interpersonal skills is hard to find. Add to that the necessity of matching the person to the particular school and it becomes a difficult task indeed.

14. The instructional coaching program, to experience success, must be supported from the district level via adequate resources, administrative support and follow-up, and dedication to objectives set. Coaches must be pushed by the district administrator to adhere to district initiatives and not be swayed by a school to get off track and slide to other priorities. In the district included in this study, considerable funds are expended on the coaching program as the district pays the salary of the coach. Further, the district provides a district level administrator as the supervisor of the program, allowing for the coaches to meet weekly in order to gauge the compliance and progress of schools toward with initiatives set.

15. It is imperative that instructional coaches meet with other coaches on a regular basis to share frustrations and challenges. Sharing of ideas and problems deepens the skill level of the coach as they are able to discuss specific issues and reach proposed solutions. Further, this enables the coaches to see the broader picture, as opposed to

viewing all issues only through the lens of their individual school. The coaches in the district under study voice dissatisfaction if one of their weekly meetings is cancelled and express that the time spent together is invaluable as they can query each other and receive feedback that they can use to modify what they are doing and, thereby, increase their effectiveness.

16. Instructional coaches developed considerable skills in data analysis as they were often confronted with probing questions from teachers for which answers backed by research or data were required for the sake of credibility and the potential for creating lasting change in teacher instructional behavior. It is vital that coaches be trained in data analysis as well as various ways to display graphic information for greatest impact.

17. Coaches within this study were required as part of their job description to maintain a detailed log of their activities during the school year. The district and local school can utilize this information to publicize accomplishments to all stakeholders.

18. Instructional coaches have great expertise in curriculum and instruction but these skills are overlooked or even ignored by the teaching staff until a relationship of trust has been developed between the teachers and the coach. In this study, the coaches had idle time upon occasion as teachers did not request or access their services as much as had been anticipated. This underutilization of services disappears as soon as the trust factor is established. This can be facilitated by the coach by developing a strong relationship with a small core of teachers and slowly spreading out to those that are ambivalent and then finally approaching the determined resisters

19. There are other districts across the nation that employ the services of an instructional coach. School leaders that share the research regarding the utilization of such services for professional development seem to experience less resistance to the changes in instructional delivery suggested by the coach.

20. The coaches within this study stated that their effectiveness improved as soon as teachers were convinced that the coach would not be used by the principal as an evaluator. Teachers began to depend on the feedback they can obtain from the instructional coach and felt free to ask questions of the coach that they would never ask of the principal or anyone else perceived as having control over their potential for obtaining a contract for employment. The principal, coach and teachers must understand the division of roles, with the principal serving as the evaluator of teachers and the coach serving in a strictly supportive and assistive role that does not involve evaluation of a teacher for employment purposes.

21. Finding adequate time during the school day for collaboration between the coach and teachers is difficult, given the demands and schedule of a regular school day. Teachers in the study stated that when the coach first arrived at the school, they were not willing to utilize any of their planning time to access the instructional coach. However, as the school year progressed and the benefits of developing a professional relationship with the coach became apparent, teachers began to compete with each other for what time the coach had available.

22. The principal, as the instructional leader of the school, must state emphatic support for the instructional coaching program for the program to succeed. The coach at the school within this study that had the indisputable support of the principal experienced less resistance from teachers when suggesting changes in instructional practices and initiating district initiatives.

23. Coaches within the study noted that many teachers had low expectations for the students they served. Changing the perceptions of teachers regarding the potential learning level of their students has proven to be a great challenge. It is important that the principal be vocal in challenging these low expectations and championing the efforts of the instructional coach to raise the expectations that teachers have for the students they serve.

Recommendations

1. School districts should locate funds to assign an instructional coach to every school. Barring that possibility, districts should target schools with larger numbers of students at-risk of not reaching their potential. Federal funds can often be accessed for this purpose, particularly if the school in question is designated as a Title I school. When federal funds are not available, district funds could be apportioned for this purpose as the cost-benefit ratio should be profitable, provided the right coach is selected for the job. Make certain in this process that the board of education is supportive of the program and understands its goals thoroughly.

2. Train the principal of the school housing an instructional coach so he understands the roles, exclusions, and possibilities inherent in the position. The district should write a detailed job description for the coaching position and devise a list of tasks the coach is NOT to perform, such as substitute in classes and evaluation teachers. This will help clarify the expectations for the program and communicate the true mission of the coaching position from the district's point of view. The position should be viewed as a district level but the coach's office must be located in the local school so teachers have access to the coach on a daily basis. Make certain that the principal is aware of all district initiatives that the coach is expected to push toward implementation and emphasize to principals the necessity of vocalizing school administrative support for each initiative and the role of the coach. Also, go over the job description, expectations, and district initiatives with the coaches so they are well informed of the all anticipated outcomes of the position. Require that principals schedule a meeting with the instructional coach to discuss the priorities set for the local school in relation to the district initiatives. At this and subsequent meetings, devise guidelines and specifics to be followed at that building. Clarify the duties of the principal and coach in relation to goal accomplishment and communication of the expectations and guidelines to faculty.

3. Make certain through the principal that teachers are aware of the roles to be served within the school by the instructional coach, emphasizing the fact that the coach is not a supervisor and will not serve in an evaluative capacity. This will clear the path for teachers to access the coach when uncertain or confused without concern for their job

security. Taking care of this issue at the inception of the program will hasten schoolwide change.

4. Educate all stakeholders in the particulars of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation as it affects the local school. This will heighten awareness and attendance to detail in meeting the provisions. Awareness leads to improved accountability. Coaches could be utilized as a tool in educating stakeholders on the guidelines and efforts of the school to meet the standards.

5. Train the coaches on strategies to use in teacher training sessions that are conducted 'just in time' at the local school. It is imperative that coaches have a repertoire of strategies for developing collegial interaction, providing time for quality reflection about practices, questioning skills that elicit thoughtful consideration about teaching behaviors, and ways to provide feedback that is non-threatening. Further, coaches must be adept at providing suggestions on improving lessons observed, helping teachers resolve classroom management issues, providing demonstration lessons incorporating a variety of best practice strategies, assisting with creating of units and future plans, resolving common problems through negotiation and innovation, and assessing actual student work and the teacher assignment made in relation to the curriculum objective.

6. Educate the instructional coaches on adult learning theory and brain based research. The instructional coach must be able to develop a strategic plan for changing teacher viewpoints for the benefit of students. For this to be able to occur without a lengthy discovery period, coaches must meet to discuss the strategies and should be given

opportunity to practice the skills prior to use in their local setting. Additionally, coaches would benefit from training in current brain research as this is a hot topic with teachers who want information stated succinctly so they can immediately place the strategies into practice for results.

7. Discuss with coaches the variety of strategies that can be utilized to train teachers that are in different career stages. Ultimately, it is best if teachers are given the opportunity to determine the topic and method of delivery of the training, empowering them as the voluntary, self-directed learner. When this is not possible, the coach must have a full range of possible ways to deliver professional training so that the needs of individual teachers are met. Differentiating training and follow-up sessions for teachers will model for them what is expected in the classroom, where there are also students with a variety of learning patterns and levels of attainment.

8. Hire coaches that are effective classroom teachers. Consequently, they will be able to provide demonstrate lessons in a classroom that are instructive for students and the teacher will observe best practice classroom management skills as well as quality content delivery via a multiplicity of instructional strategies. Also, the coach will be able to observe the teachers in their building and give useful feedback if they have the requisite experience and talent.

9. Employ instructional coaches within a school that are leaders and have organizational skills. The coach must be able to implement more than one training model within the school, as best fits the clientele, and lead the sessions in such a manner as to

elicit confidence in her ability and knowledge base. Accomplishing this requires that the coach possess leadership skills, in addition to other skills noted in this study.

10. The reader of this study must determine the transferability of the results to their local situation through a critical eye. Obtaining similar results may only occur if that district provides the same level of support as is offered by the district in this study, thereby holding weekly meetings between the coaches and a district level administrator to discuss priorities and problems. That administrator should also have a vocal and visible commitment to the overall success of the coaching program if success is to be a possibility.

11. Make certain that district and school level administrators are aware of the literature provided by various professional education organizations in support of the instructional coaching program. This will assist with building a basis of support and longevity of the program. Copies of published articles in journals could occasionally be reviewed by administrators as a group so that supportive comments could be vocalized in a public forum, creating a positive attitude toward coaching.

12. Prepare all stakeholders for the possibility that results of the instructional coaching program may not be noted in the first year of program implementation. It takes time for teachers to accept change and to develop trust in the opinions and suggestions of an expert that arrived at the beginning of the school year. It is best, however, if the coach is not from the local school's teaching ranks as one is never considered expert among those that were recently peers.

13. Consider the climate of the school and the stylistic and technical skills of the coach applicants in selecting the right coach for the job. Remember that interpersonal and professional skills must be apparent if the coach is to be successful. This person must have excellent grasp of at least one content area, has to have a vast repertoire of pedagogical knowledge and classroom management strategies, possess excellent people skills, understand adult learning theory, be innovative yet determined to get results, exhibit a calm demeanor when mediating situations, be perceived as friendly and inclusive, know where to find resources, have good questioning skills, and be so committed to task as to be perceived as persistent.

14. Support for the instructional coaching program must be apparent at the district level. This can be evidenced through provision of adequate resources for salaries and materials, statement of goals for the program, provision of training for coaches, regular follow-up of progress made, and holding principals and coaches accountable for results.

15. Schedule regular meetings with other instructional coaches so they can share frustrations, strategies, and challenges. Discussing ideas and problems deepens the skill level of the coach as they are able to discuss specific issues and reach proposed solutions. It is important for coaches to be exposed to the broader plan of the district so they do not become myopic by only seeing what is happening at their local school.

16. Utilize the expertise of the coach as test data is analyzed. The perspective and suggestions offered by the coach can be eye-opening and lead to quality steps being

placed within the school's plan of action. In addition, the coach can use the scores when communicating the plan and need for change to teachers, making effective arguments using objective data.

17. Require coaches to maintain a log of their activities across the entire school year and collate that information into percentages of time spent in various activities for sharing with stakeholders. This provides administrators and teachers with a quick picture of what the coach has done for them during the year. Coaches should be encouraged to keep administrative tasks below twenty-five percent of their time. This includes functions such as analyzing test scores, organizing materials, completing paperwork, and attending meetings with principals or district staff. The primary part of the job function should include providing demonstration lessons, gathering resources requested by teachers, assisting with writing of lesson plans or units, collaborating on design of curriculum maps, peer coaching, attending and leading targeted meetings with teachers, and analyzing student work to assist teachers in improving assignments given. Also, the coach could write a list of school accomplishments for the year and share that with school faculty at year end to celebrate the progress made. Often we do not recognize how far we have come until given an opportunity to look at such a compilation. The log and list of accomplishments can also be used to justify funding.

18. If there is more than one coach within the district, allow coaches to assist each other in their area of expertise. For example, the coach from school two in this study has a terminal degree in mathematics and science. Consequently, she has traveled t

other schools within the district to assist in establishing guidelines and procedures for the Accelerated Math program and in training teachers in use of manipulatives in math instruction. Likewise, coaches with other areas of expertise have swapped out days with her and shared their knowledge.

19. Investigate how other districts are using instructional coaches and how they have resolved any defined struggles. This will keep districts from duplicating the difficulties and, hence, make progress more quickly. Information could be shared at conferences and obtained through networking with colleagues or reading available literature on the topic.

20. Make certain that the principal and all teachers within the building understand that the instructional coach is not a part of the evaluation team. Rather, the coach is a system for feedback for teachers that is supportive and assistive, never punitive. A principal may find it helpful to get a coach to assist a novice or struggling teacher with specific instructional issues but the principal must evaluate the effectiveness of the teacher using that teaching strategy.

21. Design time within the school day for teachers to access the expertise of the coach. This may be done by scheduling common plan time for teachers within one grade level so they can meet with the coach on a regular basis.

22. Voice principal support of the instructional coaching program effectively so that teachers clearly understand that the school administrator expects cooperation and collaboration to happen between the coach and teachers. This will assist with

communication of priorities within the school and lead to a greater level of teacher compliance and enthusiasm.

23. Communicate expectations for school improvement clearly through the voice of the principal and echoed through the instructional coach and the plans put into place by the school leadership team. Teachers, like students, will meet the level of expectation set by the leadership of the school.

Suggestions for Future Study

The instructional coaching program is a relatively new professional development tool; hence, there are many unanswered questions about how this job embedded model for training teachers works. Suggestions for future study include:

1. Determine which strategy for assisting teachers works best with novice instructors and which strategy is most effective when dealing with veteran teachers. There are a number of strategies defined in chapter one of this study (lesson study, peer coaching, critical friends, cognitive coaching, expert coaching, challenge coaching, learning walk, mentoring, study groups) and in the literature. It would be beneficial to coaches to know which strategy most effectively matches teachers at the varying stages of their careers. Within this study, attention could be paid to what type support is most useful at each career stage (procedural, emotional or reflective). A study of this nature would allow coaches to better differentiate professional development opportunities for teachers within their buildings.

2. Ascertain ways to overcome resistance to change among experienced teachers.

Opposition to implementing new strategies may be met from veteran teachers, who may even attempt to impair efforts toward change so vocally that newer teachers in the building are reluctant to participate (Aspen Institute, 2003; Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003). It would be beneficial for coaches to know effective ways to overcome this satisfaction with the status quo and how to address those who may become defensive when approached about new teaching practices.

3. Establish procedures and policies to put into place so that teachers do not feel threatened by the instructional coach. There is a good deal of evidence that coaches must be separated from the evaluation process at the school. An investigation that generated a list of other suggested policies and procedures to put into practice upon implementation of a coaching program could lead to earlier acceptance of the coach by teachers.

4. Conclude what components must be present in the training of instructional coaches in order for them to be successful in their job. Killion & Harrison (2005) indicated that coaches will not be able to carry out the function of their position unless they receive specialized training that builds their capacity for the new role they are serving. School districts would benefit greatly from a concise compilation of skills and content that must be incorporated into professional development sessions with coaches.

5. Create a list of preferred personality traits, presentation abilities, and pedagogical skills that an educator should possess to have a reasonable expectation of success on the job as an instructional coach. One of the problems or hindrances noted in

the literature regarding the implementation of an instructional coaching program is that it is difficult to select the right person for the job. Any person transitioning from the job of teacher to coach should be considered expert in a content field but must have a repertoire of best practice pedagogical strategies that can be shared with other teachers or trust and respect cannot be developed. Additionally, the coach should be well grounded in application of adult learning theory and communication skills and must possess personality traits that bring teachers together collegially and for the purpose of learning. Finding teachers with these skills is difficult (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2003; Norton, 1999; Poglinco et al, 2003; Swafford, 1998). A study that provides specifics for districts to follow would be quite assistive.

Closing Remarks

Our nation thrives when the work force is skilled and well educated. To accomplish this feat, it is imperative to have strong public schools. Within those institutions of learning, the most influential entity is the classroom teacher, as they directly touch the social, academic, and physical lives of children. If those teachers are ill prepared for their task, students will not be stimulated or empowered to grasp their highest potential. The results of this study clearly indicated that instructional coaches are a tool that schools can access to enhance teaching practices and, thereby, improve student achievement levels. Schools and districts should seek ways to acquire the services of instructional coaches as their active participation in the daily operation of the school can create a collaborative spirit in a continual cycle of professional development that leads to

teachers fully engaging in the mission of the school and, thereby, meeting the challenges presented by struggling as well as advanced learners.

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APPENDIX A
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI ACCREDITATION RATINGS
FOR SCHOOLS UNDER STUDY

Appendix A

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI ACCREDITATION RATINGS

	2002 Accreditation Level	Distance from next level	Growth Status	2003 Accreditation Level	Distance from next level	Growth Status
School 1 (K-6)	3	.05 from 4	Exceeded	3	.397 from 4	Not Met
School 1 (7-12)	3	.54 from 4	Not Met	3	.677 from 4	Not Met
School 2 (K-2)	4	.062 from 5	Exceeded	3	.217 from 4	Not Met
School 2 (3-6)	4	.252 from 5	Exceeded	5	.058 above 5	Not Met
School 2 (7-12)	3	.49 from 4	Not Met	3	.437 from 4	Not Met
	2004 Accreditation Level	Distance from next level	Growth Status	2005 Accreditation Level	Distance from next level	Growth Status
School 1 (K-6)	3	.217 from 4	Not Met	3	.137 from 4	Not Met
School 1 (7-12)	3	.547 from 4	Met	2	.08 below 3	Not Met
School 2 (K-2)	5	.028 above 5	Exceeded	4	.182 from 5	Met
School 2 (3-6)	5	.278 above 5	Exceeded	4	.042 from 5	Not Met
School 2 (7-12)	4	.282 from 5	Met	4	.352 from 5	Not Met

APPENDIX B

MISSISSIPPI CURRICULUM TEST – SCORE CHANGES FROM 2001 TO 2005

FOR SCHOOLS UNDER STUDY

Appendix B

MISSISSIPPI CURRICULUM TEST – SCORE CHANGES FROM 2001 TO 2005

	2nd Grade Reading	2nd Grade Language	2nd Grade Math	3rd Grade Reading	3rd Grade Language	3rd Grade Math
Mississippi	16.8	28.5	30.7	15.9	25.5	27.7
District	-.1	12.9	17.9	9.4	14.7	23.2
School 1	-16.9	-3.8	9.4	12.7	7.1	12.8
School 2	-1.7	17.3	7.0	6.2	14.7	19.9

	4th Grade Reading	4th Grade Language	4th Grade Math	5th Grade Reading	5th Grade Language	5th Grade Math
Mississippi	11.2	18.8	21.8	11.2	17.4	20.9
District	-2.1	11.6	19.9	5.7	11.4	20.1
School 1	18.9	22.0	30.2	9.9	19.1	37.6
School 2	-6.9	13.2	24.5	7.4	10.5	19.4

	6th Grade Reading	6th Grade Language	6th Grade Math	7th Grade Reading	7th Grade Language	7th Grade Math
Mississippi	4.8	19.4	23.5	9.5	17.0	21.8
District	2.7	14.6	24.6	8.4	18.3	25.0
School 1	2.9	.9	6.0	34.8	31.5	26.5
School 2	9.5	23.1	39.9	-2.0	22.0	37.3

	8th Grade Reading	8th Grade Language	8th Grade Math
Mississippi	8.2	13.5	19.4
District	8.5	16.8	17.2
School 1	1.9	5.6	5.4
School 2	12.7	24.7	35.8

The numbers above indicate change in mean scale scores on the Mississippi Curriculum Test from 2001 to 2005 for the state of Mississippi, for the district in which the two school under study are a part, and both school under study. Scores are limited to grades 2-8 as those are the only grades in which this test is administered by the state.

APPENDIX C

MISSISSIPPI WRITING ASSESMENT MEAN SCORES

FOR SCHOOLS UNDER STUDY

Appendix C

MISSISSIPPI WRITING ASSESSMENT MEAN SCORES

4th Grade	2002	2003	2004	2005
State	2.5	2.3	2.4	2.6
District	2.8	2.4	2.8	2.7
School 1	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.2
School 2	2.3	2.1	2.4	2.2

7th Grade	2002	2003	2004	2005
State	2.3	2.3	2.5	2.5
District	2.4	2.4	2.9	2.8
School 1	2.1	2.2	2.5	2.5
School 2	2.4	2.4	2.8	2.6

The scores above are mean scores on the Mississippi Writing Assessment administered in grades four and seven annually. The charts indicate the scores obtained by the state, the district in which the school reside, and each school included in the study.

APPENDIX D

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF NON-PROMOTIONS BY GRADE

FOR SCHOOLS UNDER STUDY

Appendix D

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF NON-PROMOTIONS BY GRADE

SCHOOL 1	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Kindergarten	8/15.9	4/7.69	2/4.55	6/9.09
1st Grade	7/12.5	7/12.28	2/3.33	5/11.11
2nd Grade	3/5.0	4/7.55	3/6.38	5/9.62
3rd Grade	2/3.92	0/0	0/0	0/0
4th Grade	0/0	0/0	4/7.69	1/1.79
5th Grade	2/3.64	1/1.89	0/0	1/2.13
6th Grade	2/3.77	0/0	2/3.92	0/0
Cumulative K-6	24/6.03	16/4.26	13/3.62	18/4.90
7th Grade	8/10.67	5/8.2	2/3.85	5/10.2
8th Grade	4/6.25	7/10.14	1/1.61	6/10.91
9th Grade	2/2.78	7/10.0	3/5.08	3/4.11
10th Grade	2/5.26	0/0	3/5.08	2/3.45
11th Grade	0/0	2/6.9	1.2.04	1/1.89
12th Grade	0/0	2/7.14	1/3.7	3/6.38
Cumulative 7-12	16/8.97	23/7.41	11/3.48	20/5.92

SCHOOL 2	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Kindergarten	15/10.14	13/9.22	11/6.01	17/10.76
1st Grade	25/12.25	21/12.96	8/5.59	16/8.56
2nd Grade	6/4.88	7/3.87	7/4.73	12/8.28
3rd Grade	4/3.05	5/4.10	3/1.65	2/1.46
Cumulative K-3	50/11.18	46/7.31	29/4.3	47/7.39
4th Grade	13/9.09	3/2.19	4/3.13	7/3.89
5th Grade	21/17.36	15/10.79	13/9.15	7/5.56
6th Grade	15/9.74	4/3.31	9/6.77	9/6.47
7th Grade	30/24.79	25/15.34	13/9.70	15/9.74
8th Grade	15/13.89	15/13.89	21/15.0	12/9.09
Cumulative 4-8	94/13.8	62/8.64	60/8.57	50/6.57
9th Grade	23/17.97	14/12.39	16/15.38	11/6.96
10th Grade	7/8.05	7/7.69	4/4.3	3/3.66
11th Grade	5/7.14	5/7.25	5/6.76	2/2.30
12th Grade	5/6.41	0/0	5/8.93	5/8.33
Cumulative 9-12	40/11.02	26/7.51	30/9.15	21/5.43

The first number in each column represents the actual number of students not promoted in that grade for the school year designated. The second number (or the number after the slash mark) is the percentage of students in that grade that were non-promoted for that school year. The cumulative numbers are calculated for ease in interpretation and are divided into the configurations of the school buildings within that attendance area. School year 2001-2002 is the baseline year.

APPENDIX E

DIVISION OF TIME OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

IN TWO SCHOOLS UNDER INVESTIGATION

Appendix E

**DIVISION OF TIME OF INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES
IN TWO SCHOOLS UNDER INVESTIGATION**

ACTIVITY	SCHOOL 1 2003-2004	SCHOOL 2 2003-2004	SCHOOL 1 2004-2005	SCHOOL 2 2004-2005
Coach Accelerated Math or Reader *	5	10	10	10
Gather Instructional Resources	5	5	5	10
Demonstration Lessons	10	10	20	10
Peer Coaching	20	15	10	20
Writing Integrated Units or other Plans with Teachers*	10	5	8	5
Curriculum Mapping*	20	10	10	20
Workshops with Teachers	5	5	10	5
% time in direct contact with teachers	75	60	73	80
Special Education Referral Process	0	10	10	2
Working with Specific Students or Groups	10	5	5	3
Organizing Science Materials*	5	10	3	0
Meetings with Principals	2	5	2	5
Score Analysis	3	5	2	5
Instructional Coaching Meetings/Conferences	5	5	5	5
% time in administrative tasks	25	40	27	20
Total Time	100%	100%	100%	100%

The numbers in the table represent the percent of time the instructional coaches in the schools under study self-report engaging in the activity defined. When determining the percentages, the coaches referred back to their official coaching logs. Items with an asterisk (*) are school district initiatives. Items in the grayed area are those considered to be activities completed in direct contact with teachers, while items in the white area are generally administrative in nature.

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – PRINCIPALS

Appendix F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – PRINCIPALS

1. It is important to understand the role of the instructional coach in the school setting relative to improving teaching. Specific questions to begin discussion will include:
 - a. Has the instructional coach helped with curriculum mapping in your school? If yes, specify how she helped.
 - b. Has the instructional coach helped teachers with creating integrated lesson plans? If yes, specify how she helped.
 - c. Has the instructional coach helped with raising writing skills of your students? If yes, specify how she helped.
 - d. Has the instructional coach helped with decreasing the failure rate of classrooms in your school? If yes, specify how she helped.
 - e. Has the instructional coach helped with implementing district initiatives in your building? If yes, specify how she helped. (Initiatives include: science kits, Algebra as Child's Play, teaching on the block, inquiry based science instruction, increase in experimentation in science, increased use of calculators, senior project, learning strategies course, improving writing skills across the curriculum, curriculum mapping, integrated lesson plan use, balanced literacy, use of manipulatives in mathematics and social studies)
2. Discuss how the instructional coach assists with increasing academic achievement of students.
3. Describe the roles served by the instructional coaches that have the most impact on student achievement.
4. Describe concerns or problems you perceive as the administrator when encountering an instructional coach within the school.

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

Appendix G

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

1. It is important to understand the role of the instructional coach in the school setting relative to improving teaching. Specific questions to begin discussion will include:
 - a. What have you done with curriculum mapping in your school?
 - b. How have you assisted teachers with creating integrated lesson plans?
 - c. How have you helped with raising writing skills of your students?
 - d. How have you helped with decreasing the failure rate of classrooms in your school?
 - e. How have you assisted with implementing district initiatives in your building? (Initiatives include: science kits, Algebra as Child's Play, teaching on the block, inquiry based science instruction, increase in experimentation in science, increased use of calculators, senior project, learning strategies course, improving writing skills across the curriculum, curriculum mapping, integrated lesson plan use, balanced literacy, use of manipulatives in mathematics and social studies)
2. Discuss how the instructional coach assists with increasing academic achievement of students.
3. Describe the roles served by the instructional coaches that have the most impact on student achievement.
4. Describe concerns or problems you perceive as the instructional coach when encountering teachers and administrators within the school.

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – TEACHER GRADE CHAIRS

Appendix H

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – TEACHER GRADE CHAIRS

1. It is important to understand the role of the instructional coach in the school setting relative to improving teaching. Specific questions to begin discussion will include:
 - a. Have you sought the services of the instructional coach for help with curriculum mapping in your school? If yes, specify how she helped.
 - b. Have you sought the services of the instructional coach for help with creating integrated lesson plans? If yes, specify how she helped.
 - c. Have you sought the services of the instructional coach for help with raising writing skills of your students? If yes, specify how she helped.
 - d. Have you sought the services of the instructional coach for help with decreasing the failure rate of your classrooms? If yes, specify how she helped.
 - e. Have you sought the services of the instructional coach for help with implementing district initiatives in your classroom? If yes, specify how she helped. (Initiatives include: science kits, Algebra as Child's Play, teaching on the block, inquiry based science instruction, increase in experimentation in science, increased use of calculators, senior project, learning strategies course, improving writing skills across the curriculum, curriculum mapping, integrated lesson plan use, balanced literacy, use of manipulatives in mathematics and social studies)
2. Discuss how the instructional coach assists with increasing academic achievement of students.
3. Describe the roles served by the instructional coaches that have the most impact on student achievement.
4. Describe concerns or problems you perceive as a teacher when encountering an instructional coach within the school.